

THE INVESTIGATORS in

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHAMBER OF KNOWLEDGE





in

**THE MYSTERY
OF THE
CHAMBER OF KNOWLEDGE**

When the eccentric tramp, Rubbish-George, goes missing and his shack ransacked, Pete Crenshaw realizes that something is not right. Among the tramp's belongings, he finds a mysterious letter that points to a certain Chamber of Knowledge that holds not only treasure but the secret of the Sphinx. The trail leads The Three Investigators to the pyramids in Egypt! In unfamiliar grounds, Jupiter, Pete and Bob have to travel to many places for their search. Meanwhile, a dangerous opponent tries to stop them.

The Three Investigators
in
The Mystery of the Chamber of Knowledge

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*Based on characters created by
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Die drei ???: SMS aus dem Grab

(The Three ???: SMS from the Grave)

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1. Rubbish-George Goes Missing!

Something was wrong. The revolving door had been opened by force and was splintered in the hinges. Was it a break-in? But why? There was really nothing to steal here!

Pete overcame his fear and pushed aside the remains of the door to Rubbish-George's simple dwelling. Then he entered the wooden shack. The tramp had never been bothered by disorder, but what Pete found here was a picture of chaos!

The mattress had been slit open and the foam was hanging in shreds from the bed. A wild jumble of magazines, cups, bottles, books and tattered clothes covered the floor. Someone had brutally knocked over the wooden shelf and the boards were scattered all over the room. In the corner, a pocket radio was buzzing softly. There was no trace of Rubbish-George, although he had told Pete that he was at home at this time.

What had happened? Pete pushed a few cans aside with his feet and made his way to the bed to sit on the rusty frame. Either Rubbish-George had gone crazy or someone had broken into his shack. But what could anyone possibly steal from a tramp? Had someone here let out his anger, or was it pure revenge?

Pete didn't really trust George to destroy his own home. Sure, he lurked around the neighbourhood, and he was always a bit unpredictable, but he had gained the respect of The Three Investigators with his quick-wittedness and helped them out of trouble a couple of times.

For some time now, Rubbish-George had been living in his fleetingly knocked together shack in the backyard of a block of apartments in Little Rampart. That was after he had been driven out several times, later grudgingly tolerated, and now he belonged to the inventory of the area, so to speak. Actually, The Three Investigators knew almost nothing about the man. As a passing remark, he had once said that he had worked at a bank.

Pete was there to handover ten dollars—the amount The Three Investigators owed George for a lost bet. Since George was not there, Pete left the money in his shirt pocket. On the radio, some bonehead presenter praised the sunny day with a silly rhyme. Pete gave the device a light kick. He had no use for such a good mood.

Pete hoped that nothing bad had happened to Rubbish-George. If the tramp was in need, he and his two friends, Jupiter and Bob, had to help. The Three Investigators took on all sorts of puzzles, secrets and mysteries and clearly, the situation in George's shack was very mysterious.

Pete's gaze had just caught hold of a strange mask nailed to the wooden wall, which had survived the attack unscathed, when a shadow fell on him. He winced and turned around.

A girl stood in the doorway. She was slender, was about as tall as Pete, and her curly brown hair was tied back. A bag hung over her shoulder. Her eyes were narrowed to slits and she gave Pete a sharp look. She didn't seem to like his presence very much.

Suddenly, in her right hand, she brought out a knife. She pointed it at Pete and walked slowly towards him. Did she want to attack him? Pete was unarmed, and he looked around reflexively—there was no way out. If she wanted to get at his collar, then he was trapped.

Unwillingly Pete retreated. Had the girl caused the chaos here? Was she somehow crazy? Then everything was to be expected. Her mouth moved, but only incomprehensible sounds

came out. He had to do something, preferably something sensible...

"Take it easy," Pete said and raised his hands, "if you've made this mess, don't worry, it's not a big deal..."

Without a word, she came closer.

Pete felt the wall against his back. "We can get this sorted out! Trust me! Please put the knife down! I don't like violence!"

Her mouth moved and her facial expression suddenly changed. She glanced questioningly at Pete and then looked around the mess on the floor. Slowly, she bent down and picked up a piece of paper lying there.

Without putting the knife away, she backed away until she was next to an overturned camping table. With some effort, she managed to set it up with her free hand. Then she pulled a pencil out of her pocket, swapped it with the knife and, interrupted again and again by suspicious glances at Pete, wrote a note on the sheet with hasty movements. Then she held it up to Pete.

"So it wasn't you either?" Pete said. "Wait! You... you can't speak?" Pete slipped it out. "And you thought I destroyed all this? Rubbish-George is a good friend of ours, and I wanted to bring him something."

To confirm, he pulled the ten-dollar note from his shirt pocket. "We owe Rubbish some money," Pete explained. "My friends and I. We are investigators, not burglars! We are on the right side."

He went through his pockets and finally found one of their business cards. He then held it out to the girl with an inviting look. She reached out, took the card and looked at it. It said:



Pete looked at the girl. He sensed from her look that she believed him. She put the knife on the table and looked for something in her bag. Out came a small reddish device that looked like a mobile phone with a speaker docked to it. Her thumb flew over the keypad of the mobile phone and the loudspeaker flashed. The girl looked up and held the strange device up.

Suddenly, a pleasant female voice sounded: "My name is Layla!"

Pete gasped in shock. "You... you're talking through that device there?" he stuttered.

She pressed a key. "Yes."

"And you are Layla."

She nodded.

"I am Pete, Pete Crenshaw. That's crazy!"

She was typing again. She didn't even have to look at the keypad. "Where's George?"

"I don't know, Layla. I'm just as helpless as you are! I hope nothing has happened to him. And you? What were you doing here?"

She pondered for a brief moment. Then she typed in the answer. "I can't tell you. It's a secret."

“But you will have to reveal the secret if I am to help you! Could it be that your secret has something to do with the fact that someone has turned this whole place upside down?”

“I don’t know.”

“Who are you anyway?” Pete asked. “And what have you got to do with Rubbish-George?”

She awoke from her thoughts, looked at him, took her device and typed in the answer: “George Cooper was my mother’s friend... back in Egypt!”

2. The Secret of the Sphinx

For a moment, Pete stared at the girl speechlessly. Who was she? Why was she here? What kind of story was going on here?

Suddenly Layla walked towards the wooden wall behind which was the apartment building that Rubbish-George had nailed his shack to. She seemed to have discovered something. That woke Pete up for good. Why hadn't he thought of it right away! There was a secret revolving door there, which Pete himself had used to get out a dicey situation once before. It could be used to get into the apartment building. Perhaps Rubbish-George had fled from some sort of danger and hid there?

"Wait," Pete cried and held back Layla, who wanted to examine a crack in the wall. "A secret door! I know the mechanism!"

He assessed the wall. When he was sure he had found the right board, he pushed it. He got out into a passageway. The revolving door was immediately slammed shut again with a sharp bang, as if the breeze had thrown a door shut.

Pete was in darkness. Slowly, he straightened up. He knew where he was. Here was the basement of the adjacent apartment building. The passageway would lead to a steel door, behind which was a stairwell. A few stairs up would lead out of the building and into the colourful life of Rocky Beach.

Just as Pete was about to start moving, he heard a noise. It came from the side out of the darkness and sounded like a suppressed gasp—as if someone was deliberately holding his breath... and it was very close.

"Rubbish-George? Is that you?" Pete groped his way forward.

There was no answer.

"George?"

Again there was the suffocated breathing sound—close in front of Pete. Why didn't Rubbish say anything?

"It's me, Pete Crenshaw! George, You don't have to—"

Pete could not finish the sentence as a blow struck him, but it slipped off his temple. Pete raised his arms protectively, then the second attack came at his head, and he slumped down. He was still trying to protect himself from the unstoppable impact on the ground, but he still fell.

Footsteps moved along the passageway towards the door, which was then opened. A beam of light from the street level hit Pete, who lay huddled on the ground, holding his head where blood was throbbing.

But he remained conscious. The door fell shut and everything was dark as before. Pete struggled to pull himself up. Step by step, he stumbled forward towards the exit. The person who attacked him couldn't possibly be Rubbish-George! It had to be the burglar! He had seen Pete coming and had fled through the secret door. Perhaps Pete could still catch him if he hurried!

With trembling hands, Pete searched for the door handle, then he finally found it. A few seconds later, he had fought his way up the stairs and, still trembling all over, threw himself onto the street.

The bright sun blinded him. His head ached. Somewhere, footsteps were moving away quickly. Pete turned in that direction and bumped into a woman.

“Can’t you be careful!” A bag fell to the ground and a load of sweets rolled across the pavement.

“Excuse me!” Pete bent down and helped to collect candy and chocolate.

Nothing mattered now anyway. The burglar was long gone. Only a tramp smiled at him with a strange grin. The woman babbled something about a child’s birthday party and Pete, with further words of regret, pressed a few lollipops into her hand.

Nevertheless, he jogged around the block to get back to Rubbish-George’s shack via the backyard. He urgently wanted to see the girl.

The moment he stepped back in the yard, a basketball flew towards him. Even among all the junk, the children found room for their game. With a well-aimed throw, Pete hurled the ball back. Shortly afterwards, he reached the door of the shack and went in.

“Layla!” he called out.

She was no longer there.

“Layla!” Pete climbed over the objects lying on the floor to the other side, pressed carefully against the revolving door and peered into the darkness. “Layla!”

Nothing.

“Damn! She’s gone!”

He sat down on the edge of the bed again. What kind of situation had he got himself into? Again he felt the raging pain in his head. He touched his temple. A thick bulge was already forming there.

“What a surprise egg,” he thought and tried to smile, but that only caused more pain.

His gaze wandered over the chaos in Rubbish-George’s shack. There was really nothing left in its original place—books, clothes, and a can of lentil soup in between. If Rubbish-George came back now, he would be devastated.

Pete stood up, groaning. It didn’t work that way. He decided to put the worst things in order. First of all, he put up the table and the shelf. Then he took care of the old CD player, which the power cord had just saved it from crashing on the ground. To check, Pete pressed the ‘start’ button. The device was running. Pete connected the loudspeaker cables and instantly wild surf music started roaring. Startled, he turned the sound down. His head could not stand it. Then Pete picked up the gas cooker and put it on the shelf—the kitchen was ready for use again. Satisfied, he placed the can of lentil soup on top.

After a few minutes, the shack already looked quite cosy again, at least by George’s standards. The last thing Pete did was to take care of the books and magazines that had been scattered wildly on the floor. Under a pile of newspapers, an old club emblem of Manchester City Football Club appeared. That Rubbish had taken an interest in English football was not unusual for a man whose nickname ‘Rubbish’ indicated English origin. Pete carefully hung the crest on the wall. Then he picked up the books—a few well-thumbed thrillers, an old bus time-table, and a large-format illustrated book about Egypt.

Layla had hinted that Rubbish had lived in Egypt. Curious, Pete searched further, but found no other clues to the land of the pyramids and pharaohs. Then there was a cookbook, a few novels... Pete put everything together in a pile and placed it on the next available shelf space.

Then his gaze fell on a small magazine which was still on the floor. It was about the same Manchester City Football Club. Pete had always been interested in football. He picked up the magazine, sat down on the bed and began to flip through it. It had a write-up of the club’s story and a collection of photographs. Pete leafed through visibly yellowed pages and then he

paused. He discovered a completely different text—a handwritten text—which was in the middle of the magazine. Was that a binding error?

His eyes fell on some words:

Chamber of Knowledge... Cairo... The secret of the Sphinx...

What was that? Pete excitedly turned back to the page where the strange text began. There was a title:

*My Search for the Chamber of Knowledge
By Sir Leonard Dempsey in Cairo.
For Cathrin.*

It was a letter dated a few years ago. Pete put himself in place and read on with growing fascination:

Dear Cathrin,

This is the story of my search for the Chamber of Knowledge. Since I learned of its existence, I can't think of anything else.

After years of finding and deciphering rare writings from numerous sources, exploring secret locations, and interviewing local experts, I have discovered the work of a man called Al-Bastra. He died a normal death a few years ago but his work finally led me on the decisive track.

The Chamber of Knowledge is hidden and secured for thousands of years. In it are ancient treasures, artefacts, and most importantly, archives of esoteric knowledge. Of immense significance is the secret of the Sphinx that explains why the Great Sphinx was built, by whom, and the secret it holds. In one fell swoop, I will turn the findings of hundreds of years of research upside down...

Pete paused his reading and took a deep breath. Of course, he had heard about the Sphinx—a giant stone lion with a human head that guarded the pyramids near Cairo in Egypt. No one knew exactly why it had been built, but the author of this letter had obviously discovered the secret.

Suddenly, he heard footsteps outside. Pete quickly hid the magazine under his T-shirt. He had to get out of here. Maybe the mysterious visitor came back... or was it George?

Pete crept to the broken door and was relieved to find that it was just one of the older boys looking for their basketball. Nevertheless, the interruption had made it clear to him that it was probably better to leave. A bump on the head was enough for now.

With hurried steps, Pete crossed the backyard a few seconds later.

3. Surprise Visit

Only when Pete had entered The Jones Salvage Yard, did he dare to pull the magazine out from under his T-shirt. Hopefully Jupiter and Bob were at their headquarters. There was a lot to talk about!

Titus Jones, Jupiter's uncle, with whom Jupiter had lived since the death of his parents, was bending over a large wooden box and waving to Pete from a distance. Pete greeted back cautiously, hoping that he did not have another job for the investigators as there was always something to clean up at the salvage yard. They really didn't need such work now. Even more dreaded among The Three Investigators were the instructions of Aunt Mathilda, Titus's wife. While Uncle Titus could at least be negotiated with, Aunt Mathilda knew best how to break any resistance from the boys with energetic words.

Fortunately, he could not see Aunt Mathilda anywhere. This was probably why Bob and Jupiter did not sit in the stuffy trailer for a change, but enjoyed the sun on the verandah of the salvage yard office. Both were sweating over a game of chess, and with one glance, it was clear to Pete that Jupiter would defeat his opponent in a few more moves. It was a miracle that the First Investigator found any playing partners at all. Pete had given up on it long ago and only competed against Jupiter in sporting competitions, where things were exactly the other way round.

"Hi, Jupe! Hi, Bob! I've got something to tell you!"

"Wait a minute! I'll have him in a minute," Jupiter growled, without taking his eyes off the chess board.

"Never mind! Let's forget this stupid chess game!" cried Bob.

Pete grinned and threw the football magazine on the table. Jupiter took a quick look at it and immediately turned back to his chess pieces.

"What happened to you?" Bob asked when he noticed the injury on Pete's head.

"Give me a minute and I'll tell you," Pete said.

"Have you spoken with Mr Lindgren?" Bob asked.

"Mr Lindgren?" For a brief moment, Pete looked at his friend with irritation. "No, why? Our trip is still on as far as I know."

Mr Lindgren was a colleague of Pete's father and both of them worked on special effects at a large movie studio. Recently Mr Lindgren and two other colleagues had flights booked to attend an event in London but they had to change plans. Through Pete's father, he had kindly transferred the tickets to The Three Investigators.

Pete pulled a chair towards Bob and sat down. "I'll tell you about two encounters—one was extremely painful and the other was very nice... even if it was a little mysterious..."

"That sounds like a fight and a girl," Bob speculated. "Tell me more about the girl! Was she good-looking?"

Pete shook his head. "You are simply impossible... as if I were a great ladies' man! It's not my fault that I'm—"

"What?" Bob interrupted him.

"—So good to be with!" Pete finished what he wanted to say.

"Checkmate!" Jupiter cried proudly and looked up. "What are you talking about?"

“Oh, nothing that concerns you,” said Pete. “Anyway, I’ve brought you a football magazine.”

“Oh, how exciting!” Jupiter ironically remarked, who had never shown any interest in football, or any sport for that matter. “I hope we won’t be threatened with another sports case!”

Pete grinned so much that he felt his injury. “Take a look,” he added.

Listlessly, Jupiter grabbed the magazine and turned the pages crosswise. Suddenly he stopped. “What is this?” He came across the handwritten pages and bent down lower. “The Chamber of Knowledge? ... The secret of the Sphinx? ... That is... yes! That is sensational! ... Did you know that for decades all kinds of researchers have been trying to solve the secret of the Sphinx in Egypt? All we know is that it probably wears a royal face and guards the realm of the dead. There are rumours that under her stony feet in the desert sand, there are secret chambers that hold the knowledge of the world... but no one has ever found anything like it. And now it is written here that there might be an answer to all the questions... Where did you get this, Pete?” Without waiting for an answer, Jupiter continued reading. He was clearly gripped by it.

“Give me that,” Bob urged. When Jupiter did not react, he stood behind his friend and peered over his shoulder.

Pete looked at them for a while, then he pulled the magazine out of Jupiter’s hand. “So far, I only know the beginning of this strange letter,” he said.

“It’s best if you let us read the letter from the beginning so that we are all on the same page,” Bob suggested.

Jupiter placed the letter on the table and the three of them read it silently from the beginning.

Dear Cathrin,

This is the story of my search for the Chamber of Knowledge. Since I learned of its existence, I can’t think of anything else.

After years of finding and deciphering rare writings from numerous sources, exploring secret locations, and interviewing local experts, I have discovered the work of a man called Al-Bastra. He died a normal death a few years ago but his work finally led me on the decisive track.

The Chamber of Knowledge is hidden and secured for thousands of years. In it are ancient treasures, artefacts, and most importantly, archives of esoteric knowledge. Of immense significance is the secret of the Sphinx that explains why the Great Sphinx was built, by whom, and the secret it holds. In one fell swoop, I will turn the findings of hundreds of years of research upside down.

Tomorrow morning at dawn, I believe I would be nearing the end of my search. However before that, I want to reveal the information I know to you. I need to do so in case I do not survive tomorrow—for in the chamber lies the curse of the Sphinx. This is a small version of the Sphinx guarding the chamber. According to ancient writings, this Sphinx is deadly. The curse is supposed to protect the secret knowledge. No one is said to have left the chamber alive.

Although Al-Bastra discovered the chamber, he had not dared to enter it. He did not want to disturb the secret as he was afraid of the curse. But his discovery was not lost as before his death, he had entrusted a few people to act as his agents.

For the same concerns as Al-Bastra, these agents have no interest in entering the chamber. However for a fee, they are agreeable to bring to this location, interested

parties, who are able to decipher and cite a secret phrase. However, the agents assumes no responsibility for the well-being and safety of anyone entering the chamber. This venture is at your own risk, but as far as I am concerned, the rewards are great.

I can't say that I believe in the curse, but I have to anticipate danger. My competitor, Frank, is also on the same trail. I have to warn you that he will do anything to get his hands on this letter. Not only that, he might cause you harm. So please be careful and stay away from him.

If I am unsuccessful, at least I have done my part to pass the information to someone that I trust—and that is you. Al-Bastra does not make it easy to locate the chamber. He specifies a process to get three secret words from three different locations. Then, you will have to figure out the secret phrase which is a meaningful sentence containing these three words. With this, you go to a secret location, ask for the agent, cite the secret phrase in Arabic, and pay whatever fee that is asked for. Only then you will be led to the chamber.

So the following is the directions I have unravelled from Al-Bastra which have to be followed in the specific order:

1. Locate the symbol of the ancient royalty of Egypt. It is the link between human and deity, and a symbol of human dominance over nature. That is the first word.

2. Locate the tomb of a priest, which was recently unearthed. Look for a stone coffin where there is a statue that guards and protects the dead. What else does the statue represent? That is the second word.

3. At the same tomb, find the symbol of immortality, resurrection, and transformation. Locate it in its new home. It will direct you to the next location, where you find a word at the southern viewpoint. That is the third word. Now you have to figure out the secret phrase which is a meaningful sentence containing all three words.

4. Using the third word, locate a small and very old shop in the big bazaar. Ask for the agent and cite the secret phrase in Arabic. If you are correct, the agent will bring you to the chamber.

Once in the chamber, beware of the Sphinx. Do not provoke her. The red glow of the eyes herald death! And the deadly breath will destroy you!

The Sphinx's question to you is this: 'Tell me, where lies the key to the truth?'

Answer the Sphinx's question—but be silent... If you are wrong, the red eyes of death will shine. If you are right, the gate to knowledge will open.

Beloved Cathrin, that is all! I have to prepare for my venture tomorrow. I wish you the best and I hope to see you again.

Leo

Jupiter looked up. "That's incredible! I hope someone didn't just make this text up! If what it says here is true, we are on the trail of a sensational discovery!"

Pete smiled sourly. "Would you be so kind as to listen to me first? Indeed, there might be some truth in this letter! At least when I tell you the circumstances that I found this."

"I thought you went to see Rubbish-George!" exclaimed Bob.

"That was how it all started," said Pete.

Then he told them what he had experienced—the confusion in the shack of Rubbish-George, whose real name was George Cooper; the strange encounter with Layla from Egypt; the painful encounter with a stranger; and finally the discovery of the magazine. He finished his report with a question: “Do you think the strange burglar could have been looking for this magazine at Rubbish-George’s shack?”

“Only what is in it!” Jupiter took the Manchester City club magazine out of Pete’s hand and examined the letter. “Someone very carefully pasted one edge of the letter in between the pages of the magazine,” he noted. “In this way, it cannot be noticed at first glance of the magazine... but why?”

“Of course, to hide them from someone,” Pete and Bob said as if from the same mouth.

Jupiter nodded. “This letter should not fall into the wrong hands—that much is clear.”

He held the letter very close to him, felt it and looked up. “It doesn’t seem to be a copy, but an original!... Fellas, I’m afraid we’ll have to postpone our little trip to London for a few days and deal with this mystery!”

“We’ll see about that,” Bob said undecidedly. The trip to London attracted him a lot. England... castles... ghosts...

But Pete did not agree. “We must take care of Rubbish-George. I am worried about him! We should go and find him. If we’re lucky, he’s just wandering around somewhere, so all this fuss will be for nothing!”

Jupiter and Bob looked at each other for a moment. Looking for Rubbish-George meant that they had to restrain their curiosity for a while.

“Okay,” Jupiter decided. “We won’t let Rubbish down! We grab about bikes and go now. Pete, you check the beach area, Bob the city centre and I’ll check the residential areas. We’ll meet back here in an hour.”

Without further delay, they stood up. Jupiter swept all the chess pieces into its box together with the folded chess board. Then he took the football magazine indecisively in his hands. He knew he shouldn’t be taking it with him, but was also too lazy to bring it to their headquarters, so he placed the magazine on a side table and the box of chess pieces on top of it.

“It should be safe here in the office,” he murmured and then followed Pete and Bob to the bicycles.

The Three Investigators left the salvage yard and set to work. But after an hour, Pete returned without success. Bob just cycled in from the other side and waited for him in front of the salvage yard gate. Also, he was without success.

Then Jupiter arrived and he, too, shook his head. “Nothing.”

“We should inform Inspector Cotta,” Pete said disappointedly, “even though I fear that he will not initiate an investigation just because a tramp has not come home.”

When they pushed the bikes into the yard, the door of the office was opened and Aunt Mathilda came out to meet them. “Jupe! There you are at last! Where have you been? You have a visitor waiting for you in the office for some time!”

“A visitor?” Jupiter asked. “Who is it?”

“Why, a pretty girl! Actually, she asked for Pete, not you,” she said with a regretful look at her nephew, who has always been more interested in programming, logic and mathematics than in girls.

Stunned, Jupiter walked to the office. When he went in, he saw the girl sitting at the side table, eating a piece of Aunt Mathilda’s cherry pie and cheerfully leafing through the football

magazine she must have found under the chess box.

“Give me that!” Jupe exclaimed.

She turned around in fright, but no sound came out of her.

“Give me that!” Jupiter went up to her and tried to snatch the magazine from her hand.

“What are you doing reading that magazine?”

“Stop, Jupe! She can’t speak!”

Jupiter turned around. “Huh?”

Pete stood in the doorway. “I hadn’t mentioned it before! Layla is mute! What are you freaking out about?”

“Because... because...” Jupiter stuttered. A thousand thoughts shot uncoordinated through his brain. Why did he freak out like that? Because someone was reading the football magazine without his permission? Because he had been too lazy to bring the magazine into the trailer? Because he sensed that Pete liked this girl? Because girls only interfered with detective work? And because nobody understood him?

“You are right,” said Jupiter. “Let’s sit down first.”

Pete’s facial features relaxed. “Hi, Layla,” he said. “How did you find us?”

Layla took out the device, which Pete already knew, and typed in the answer. “Your business card. You had suddenly disappeared! I asked my way around to come here.”

“That was a secret door. I walked through the apartment building back to the street.” At this moment, Pete didn’t want to tell her about his painful encounter with the burglar. “Did you find George?”

She shook her head and pointed to the football magazine. “You took that from George!”

“What makes you think so?” Jupiter asked in between. “How do you even know about the magazine?”

“I even had it in my hand before, but I didn’t look at it,” Layla said calmly. “I thought it was just a football magazine.”

“It is,” Jupiter said provocatively.

She smiled. “No. It’s the key to George’s secret!”

4. The Treasure in Egypt

“Your aunt is really very nice,” Layla said to Pete and cheerfully ate the rest of her cherry pie. “I’m sure she has a piece left for you too. Won’t you ask her?”

“It’s my aunt,” Jupiter corrected her. “And the pie can wait. Now first tell us who you are. What is this strange device you are using?”

She was typing. Jupiter noticed with astonishment that she didn’t even look at the keypad, but kept looking at him without interruption. “My connection to the world. It’s a speaking device. I call it ‘Talky’. You can even enter commands for sentence stress.”

“Interesting!” Jupe remarked, astonished. “By the way, how do you know Rubbish-George?”

“I don’t think it’s very nice that you call him ‘Rubbish’.”

“Here, everyone calls him that,” Jupe said.

“Because he’s a tramp? Because he lives among rubbish? Still, he’s got some sort of a home of his own.”

“Okay, so how do you know Rub—uh... George?” Jupiter continued.

“In Egypt. Years ago, he worked there for an English bank. He was my mother’s friend—until he suddenly disappeared.”

Jupiter looked at the girl doubtfully. It all seemed very strange to him. Rubbish-George was not in his shack as Pete found out. Instead, Layla turned up. Then Pete got hit on his head. Finally, there was this football magazine and now Layla was here in the salvage yard, leafing through it. Was she telling them some big fat lie? He had become cautious since his encounter with Brittany, a girl who had deceived him in two previous cases.

“We can check on George’s stay in Egypt,” he said coolly. “Why are you in California? And above all, what do you want from us?”

“Is this an interrogation? I’m sorry if I’m eating your pie. Sorry if I’m sitting on your chair! Sorry to steal your precious time.” The sentences sounded strangely neutral over her Talky, even if she could emphasize the stress in the words. She dropped her Talky into a side pocket, grabbed the football magazine and stood up.

“Wait!” Jupe cried.

But with a skilful turn, she had pushed past the visibly surprised Jupiter and raced out of the office.

“Stop! Layla! Give me the magazine back!” When Jupiter went after her, he collided with Pete.

“Make way, fatso! I’m faster!” Pete quipped.

Pete rushed out of the office, sped across the yard and passed the big gate. He looked up and down the street. Where was Layla? How could she disappear so fast? Then he saw her. Layla waved and ran alongside a bus that was moving away. The driver braked, opened the doors and let her get on. The doors weren’t closed yet, when the bus moved off.

Pete turned around and dashed back into the salvage yard. Jupiter and Bob stumbled towards him, but Pete ran straight through between them, threw himself on his bike and started pedalling. He had decided to go after Layla!

When he reached the street again, the bus was already out of sight, but Pete knew its route. He overtook a slowly rolling Chevrolet and shifted up a gear. After a few minutes, he had his sights set on the bus again. Hopefully Layla hadn't got out of it yet. If so, he could relax and just follow the bus.

The bus went through the city centre and the stops were close together. Pete rode up close. When the bus stopped the next time, he cycled past it on the left. There she sat, on one of the back seats. Satisfied, Pete slowed down and let himself be overtaken again.

The bus left the city centre and rolled into a residential area. Suddenly Pete knew where Layla wanted to go. True enough, she got off at the next stop. Without looking back, she hurried down the street and disappeared into a backyard. Quietly, Pete followed her. He pedalled and let the bike roll to the front of Rubbish-George's shack. A few seconds later, he entered.

"Hello, Layla!"

She sat on the bed and had just opened the magazine. When she noticed Pete, she quickly put it aside. Her mouth moved and she took out her Talky. She typed without looking. "You followed the bus?"

Pete nodded.

"Your friend doesn't like me!"

"Jupiter is not always easy, but together with Bob, they are the best friends I have!"

Layla smiled. "I prefer you, Pete!"

Pete sat next to her. "Tell me more about Rubbish-George."

She typed for a while. "It's been almost five years. He worked in a bank and met my mother there. She is English and lived alone with me in Cairo. My father was Egyptian and died early in one of the wars. My mother and George spent some time together.

"Then something happened. My mother never explained it to me in detail. It was some crooked thing that George was involved in. Anyway, he was accused of embezzling the bank of 1.5 million Egyptian pounds. That's a bit more than \$100,000. All of his belongings have been seized. His life was then turned upside down. My mother was not convinced of his innocence and left him. He also lost his job. With his life in shambles, George ran away from Egypt."

"And now you're looking for him?"

"I have tried again and again to find out where he is. My mother didn't want to do that. She lives with someone else now and has long since finished with George. But now I've got to reach out to him!"

"You want to know what happened?"

"Whether he was really the criminal everyone thought he was."

"And what do you think?" Pete asked.

"He was the best friend my mum ever had!"

Pete took the magazine and leafed through it. "And you think it has something to do with this strange story?"

"Yes. Back then, he told me he would find a treasure and then we could all go somewhere else and live a carefree life. We didn't have much money. My mother only worked as a cashier at the bank. On the other hand, George made good money there, but he had to pay off several debts."

"Well? Did he find the treasure?"

"No, but that's not it. It seemed that he took the money from the bank and disappeared."

"Hmm... So what are you gonna do now?"

“I have one more day before I go back to Egypt. I will still try to look for him, else I will file a missing persons report here. In Cairo, I will solve the mystery of this chamber. I’m going to find it myself!”

“But you can’t take the magazine with you! I found it.”

“It’s George’s!”

“But it not yours either!”

She expelled air and hit her legs with her fists.

“Make yourself a copy!” she wrote. “I have to go!” Her head went up and her mouth moved.

“Then I’ll go with you!” Pete cried. “Let me help you, Layla. You can’t solve the mystery alone. If a guy like Rubbish-George can’t do it by himself—”

“I’m going back to Egypt,” Layla wrote. “How can you just go like that?”

“We have a trip to London tomorrow,” Pete said. “I’ll just get a connecting flight from there to Cairo!”

Layla looked at him with an inscrutable look. Pete thought he read a hint of doubt in it, but he also saw honest joy.

Then she smiled and Pete sensed that some things didn’t need words.

5. Camels

There was no way Jupiter and Bob were going to let Pete go alone. A treasure in Egypt? That sounded far too promising! Besides, maybe they would find out something about Rubbish-George's strange disappearance.

Without hesitation, Jupiter declared the mystery of the Chamber of Knowledge a case for The Three Investigators. Mr Lindgren's friendly assistant booked a connecting flight from London to Cairo and also took care of a hotel for them there. The Three Investigators would be in Cairo a day earlier than Layla as her flight was on the following day transiting in Paris.

The journey to Egypt was strenuous. The Three Investigators almost missed the connecting flight. But when they finally saw the pyramids from the plane, the excitement gave way to a tingling anticipation. After the immigration formalities had been completed and Juve had exchanged Egyptian money, The Three Investigators took a rickety taxi from the airport to the city a good hour later.

The trip to the city was an eye-opener. "What luck that I don't have to drive here!" Pete moaned. "My MG would have been squashed by now!"

The taxi had been driving them around the streets of Cairo for some time, and the ride resembled a game of chance. On the multi-lane roads, the taxi driver squeezed into every opening gap without a second thought. Since the other cars did the same, everything was a mess. Surprisingly, they made progress and The Three Investigators had long since given up paying attention to the other cars that were constantly honking.

And their taxi driver was the calm itself. Now and then he looked in the rear-view mirror and wanted to know something in broken English—where they came from, what they wanted in Cairo and whether they needed help. Jupiter replied vaguely. He was still not sure if they hadn't negotiated a far too high price for the trip. But the more time passed, the more he calmed down. In Los Angeles, such a long journey would have been much more expensive.

The Three Investigators had never been to an Arab city before. They looked around curiously. The road leading over a viaduct offered them unusual views of the maze of streets in Cairo. The city was full of life but everything seemed so confusing—the cars, horse-drawn carriages, people, stalls, the brownish rectangular houses, and the mosques with their strange play of shapes. It was a strange world.

Would they really find their way around here and solve the mystery? It was so different from Rocky Beach, where they were at home. But none of the boys dared to express their doubts out loud.

After a good half hour, they crossed the Nile. The taxi turned off the main road and drove along the bank. Large ships were moored there, several of which, as the driver explained, housed restaurants. The taxi driver turned off again and stopped at a security checkpoint. "Hotel," he said.

After a cursory check, they were let through to the entrance portal. Layla had recommended the hotel to them. It was a top hotel, but compared to the London accommodation they would have stayed in, this was much cheaper.

Jupiter gave the driver a little tip and made sure that the small red bag, into which he had put the magazine with the letter, was still in its place. Then The Three Investigators walked

expectantly into the old palace that had been converted into a hotel.

After checking in, they moved into their room, which was in an unadorned outbuilding, and distributed the sleeping places. With the argument of his stately weight, Jupiter got one of the two king-size beds for himself, and Pete and Bob took the double bed that was by the window. They knew it was very uncomfortable lying next to Jupiter as he was so heavy, he pressed a deep pit into the mattress.

The Three Investigators hurriedly stuffed their clothes into a chest of drawers. They carefully stored their detective equipment and their tracking device in the safe. Then Jupiter took out their mobile phone and handed it to Pete.

“Yeah, I’ll take this along,” said Pete.

When everything was stowed away, the friends opened the last bottle of Coke they brought from home and sat down together. “Now we have a day to look at Cairo,” said Pete. “Layla’s flight is only leaving today.”

“Wouldn’t it be great to pick her up from the airport and present her with the solution to the mystery?” asked Jupiter.

At the moment, Pete sat up straight. “You mean we’re going ahead without her?”

“Sure!” Jupiter took the red bag that he had thrown on the bed earlier. It was so small that the football magazine just fit in it. This had the advantage that Jupiter could hide it under his T-shirt if necessary. He carefully took out the magazine containing the letter from Sir Leonard Dempsey.

“I read the letter carefully on the flight here. There are four places to go to get the three words and the final location of the agent,” Juve summarized. “I think I already know the first two locations.”

“What?” Pete exclaimed. “You really know how to take the fun out of solving a mystery!”

Juve ignored Pete’s mocking and continued: “Let’s start at the beginning. The first location is at the symbol of the ancient royalty of Egypt.”

“I think that would be the pyramids,” Bob suggested. “They are clearly a symbol of Egypt, and they were built by the ancient royalty.”

“Aha,” Juve said, “but it also says that this symbol is the link between human and deity, and a symbol of human dominance over nature. That to me is clearly the Great Sphinx of Giza.”

“You’re right!” Bob remarked. “The giant statue was built more than 4,500 years ago to guard the pyramid next to it.”

“The pyramid of Khafre,” Juve added. “So from the letter, we already have the first word—‘Sphinx’, but we still have to go there. From there, we have to make our way to the second location—which is not too obvious for a typical tourist...”

“The letter says to locate the tomb of a priest which was recently unearthed,” Juve said. “Before we left LA, I checked this up on the Internet. The latest tomb to be uncovered is known as the ‘11th Tomb of the Priest’. It lies a distance from the Great Sphinx, so we have to figure out how to get there. In any case, we go to the Great Sphinx first thing tomorrow morning! Why waste time?”

Bob nodded.

“But this involves Layla!” protested Pete. “And she asked me to wait for her!”

“We are only doing what she wants us to do,” said Jupiter. “And we’ve always done the best without outside help.”

“You don’t seem to trust her!” Pete exclaimed.

Jupiter squirmed.

"I knew it! You don't trust her!" Pete got mad. "You think there's something else behind this—a trap set by Layla or something."

"Why didn't Layla fly with us?" Jupe asked.

"Her flight could not be rebooked. That's what she said! Besides, she was looking for Rubbish-George!" Pete caught his breath. He had felt all the time that Jupiter reacted hostilely to Layla. "If you think that Layla is leading us into a trap, then we are much more likely to get into it if we go looking for the treasure alone!"

"We will be careful," said Jupiter. "We will try our luck. Perhaps by the time we get to the second location, we might find that there is nothing at all to the story. And tomorrow afternoon, we will meet her at the airport. That's a promise."

Bob nodded and threw Pete one of those 'unfortunately, you have been out-voted' looks that he hated.

Pete wrinkled his nose in response. "I'm going to the pool," said the Second Investigator grumpily, "and swim a few laps." He knew perfectly well that tomorrow all three of them would go to the Great Sphinx and start their search.

It was not difficult to get a taxi. No sooner had they got out of the hotel than they were approached. The price that Jupiter was told for the trip to the Great Sphinx was too high for him. Then a second driver, a dark-haired man in jeans and a blue shirt, came up to him.

"Take me. Good price!" he urged.

Jupiter shrugged and negotiated for a while, and then The Three Investigators were led to a rusty Peugeot parked under a nearby bridge. Pete had to grin—there was a sticker with the picture of the Sphinx attached to the rear window.

The Three Investigators got in the taxi and the journey began. The famous Sphinx and pyramids at Giza were not far from Cairo. The taxi driver, who introduced himself as Ali Eddine, quickly engaged the boys in a conversation. Jupiter took the opportunity to ask him about the smaller burial sites.

"You're interested in small tombs?" the driver asked in astonishment, evading a rubbish truck. "Usually Americans only want to see the main highlights!"

"Yes. It's for a project at school," Jupiter said indefinitely.

"Then you have to hire a camel! It's hard to get there on foot or by car."

The Three Investigators looked at each other. They were supposed to ride a camel? Why not?

"I know a good camel renter," said Ali Eddine. "And he knows good guides who will take you to the tomb!"

"Okay," said Jupiter.

After a while, the taxi turned off the main road and bumped along a clayey path bordered by dilapidated walls. All of a sudden, the boys became queasy. Where were they led to? Here they were hopelessly at the driver's mercy. Jupiter was sweating and he felt the red bag sticking to his stomach under his T-shirt.

Ali Eddine seemed to be able to read his mind. "Don't worry. All safe, mister," he said, grinning.

The Three Investigators did not make a face. They reached a small, remote place where several people were standing together. There were camels and horses there. Immediately, some of the bystanders surrounded the taxi.

Ali got out, walked over to an old man who was standing a little away and spoke to him in Arabic. Then he came back to Jupiter.

“The man will rent you the camels. I’ll pick you up again later!”

Before The Three Investigators knew it, Bob and Pete were separated from Jupiter and pushed to a camel. The old man stepped up to Jupiter and in a low voice, he named the price. Jupiter nodded in surprise.

“But that is for one camel—for your two friends,” the man added. “For you, you’ll need another camel. You’re very... uh... strong, so two camels, that’s double.”

Jupiter acted a little back and forth, but as he felt insecure, he quickly gave in. A second camel was brought in and was directed to rest on its knees so that Jupiter could climb up. Bob and Pete were already waving cheerfully from the first camel. So Jupiter swung onto the camel’s back and it stood up, hind legs first. The First Investigator almost fell down head-first, but he clung on tightly and a few seconds later, he was swinging in the airy height.

A second, younger man joined them and introduced himself as the guide. “I’ll look after you for the next two hours,” he explained to Jupiter. “I have not been paid yet, so I cost extra!”

Jupiter swallowed. Slowly he began to understand the system. They were passed from one person to another and everything cost money. He did not argue as he wanted to get on with it.

“Then please go to the 11th Tomb,” he said.

“Of course, sir.”

They rode through an alley, had to buy a ticket and finally reached a scree field. The Three Investigators were so busy holding on to the rocking camels that they didn’t even notice that the view had opened up...

In front of them were the pyramids! They towered majestically out of the desert sand—almost like alien objects. Like ants, tourists walked back and forth between them.

“Wow!” Bob exclaimed.

“There’s the Sphinx,” Pete cried and pointed a little way to the pyramids. “It’s much smaller than I thought!”

“Still fascinatingly beautiful,” Bob said and looked over.

Because the guide was in the immediate vicinity, none of The Three Investigators said anything further, but they all thought about the same thing—now they were on the trail of the secret of the Sphinx! They would have loved to go straight to the stone lion, but there was no time to lose. Later they could come back and look at the Sphinx in peace and quiet.

“Do you want a photo?” asked the guide.

Jupiter tore himself away from the sight. “Later on. First to the 11th Tomb of the Priest. Do you know where it is?”

The guide looked at him in surprise for a moment. “You seem to know your way around, mister... That was discovered only a few years ago...”

The rocking ride continued over the barren ground. Every now and then, they met other camels with tourists clinging on. Again and again, the eyes of the boys wandered to the pyramids.

After half an hour, they reached a small opening, which was cut into a rock. A man in a venerable garment waited next to the entrance like a gatekeeper.

“We are here!” the guide announced and made the camels kneel down on the sandy ground so that they could dismount.

Jupiter felt tense inside. Soon it would be decided whether there was any truth in the story from Rubbish-George’s magazine, and whether it led them on the trail at the end of which the secret of the Sphinx might be waiting.

6. In the Tomb of the Priest

The man waiting for the tourists at the entrance to the tomb welcomed Jupiter, Pete and Bob with a smile and led them inside. They entered a dark chamber carved into the rock. Slowly their eyes got used to the dimness.

Curious, The Three Investigators looked around. There were a few information boards hung on the bare walls. But in the letter in the football magazine, there was something about a stone coffin! There was nothing to be seen of such a coffin. Instead, there was only a large stone tablet, illuminated by a weak light. The Three Investigators had disappointment written all over their faces. Was there nothing to the mystery after all?

"I hope we did not travel to Egypt in vain," said Pete. He really wanted to help Layla.

Bob jokingly pushed him in the side with his elbow. "If this comes to nothing, I guess you could still enjoy the sights by the hotel pool!"

"In this case, it is different," said Pete humourlessly.

In a low voice, the man explained the inscriptions on the large stone tablet, but The Three Investigators hardly listened. Their eyes wandered around, but the chamber had no passageway that could lead anywhere else. Somewhere here must be a burial chamber with a coffin.

"Shall I explain the inscriptions to you in more detail?" the man asked in English with an Arabic accent and cautiously took a step back.

"Ah, no," Pete said. "Are there... any other things here? Coffins and stuff?"

The man smiled. "Come on!" With light steps, the Egyptian led The Three Investigators to a corner of the chamber that lay in the shadows. He walked towards a dark spot on the ground and somehow walked down.

"Will you follow me?" His voice sounded hollow.

"Hey! It's an underground passage!" Jupiter whispered. Curious, he groped his way forward and slipped into the hole with his feet first. It was dark, narrow and steep.

"Reminds me of the old escape routes at our headquarters," Jupiter tried to joke, but at that very moment, he slipped and slid down the passageway. At the same time, the red bag flew out from under his T-shirt. When Jupe landed roughly on the stone base of a lower chamber, the red bag followed him down, hit the ground with a muffled sound and the magazine slipped out. Jupe hastily picked it up.

The Egyptian was already standing there, waiting and smiling. In the meantime, Pete and Bob had also arrived at the lower chamber.

"Wow!" said Bob, clapping the dust off his hands. "The stone coffin!"

"The sarcophagus of the priest," said the Egyptian.

At the centre of this chamber was a stone cuboid coffin with carvings on the side. Bob thought that the chamber itself was not as spectacular as those that he had seen from books and the Internet, particularly that of the tomb of Tutankhamun. He had imagined such a tomb to have numerous statues, hieroglyphic characters, paintings and carvings on the walls. The guide explained that this was a tomb for a priest and not a pharaoh.

The Three Investigators looked at each other. Now the treasure fever shone in their eyes. Jupiter was still holding the football magazine in his hand. He opened the page with the letter

and looked at the relevant part:

Look for a stone coffin where there is a statue that guards and protects the dead. What else does the statue represent? That is the second word.

The Three Investigators could clearly see that there was only one statue next to the stone coffin and that was a statue of an owl. That has to be it! Just to be sure, Jupiter asked the guide the significance of the owl statue.

"In ancient Egypt, owls were associated with mourning and death," the guide explained. "Ancient Egyptians believed that owls protected spirits as they passed from one world to another."

Jupe was sure that the second clue pointed to an owl and he quickly and inconspicuously signalled to Bob and Pete not to say anything more. Clearly, he would discuss his findings later, outside the tomb.

Then there was the third clue. Pete took the magazine from Jupe and silently read the relevant part:

At the same tomb, find the symbol of immortality, resurrection, and transformation. Locate it in its new home. It will direct you to the next location...

Besides the owl statue, there was nothing else there except for carvings on the side of the stone coffin. Pete curiously pushed past Jupiter and bent down to the edge of the stone coffin. He saw that there were three animal symbols carved on one of its long sides.

"There's so little light here." Pete waved to Jupiter, who had switched on the flashlight. "I see a snake, a beetle, a cat..."

"What are you looking for?" The Egyptian had also curiously approached. "You are interested in the carvings?"

Pete bent up. "Snake, beetle... cat! What do they represent?" he asked.

"They point to objects found in this burial chamber," explained the Egyptian. "The archaeologists found these very objects here, but they had taken them away. Only the owl statue remains."

"So the objects are no longer here?" Bob asked.

"Yes. What wasn't stolen is fortunately in the Cairo museum today!" A smile flitted across his face.

"So like the owl, I suppose these animals did have a meaning for the ancient Egyptians," Jupiter wondered.

"Of course!" the guide replied. "For thousands of years, ancient Egyptians worshipped many animals for different reasons. You see here the carvings of three different animals. The cobra is usually a symbol of sovereignty and royalty. In this case for the priest, it is a symbol of deity and divine authority. The scarab bug symbolizes the restoration of life. The cat is perhaps the most sacred of all ancient Egyptian animals. They are found in social and religious practices and considered the guardian of the underworld."

Jupiter posed himself. "Thanks. I think we have seen what we wanted to see. Let's go, fellas!"

"What about the other tablets?" the man asked and looked at Jupiter attentively. "Or do you want to know what it's like to lie in a coffin?"

"No, thanks," Jupe said. "I... we'd like to go on."

"Very well!" The Egyptian pointed to the narrow opening at the foot of the wall. "Then we go back up!"

The Three Investigators paid for the tour and sat back on the camels. As long as their eyes fell on the pyramids, they now had to go to the Cairo museum for the next clue.

With a shrug of the shoulders, their camel guide accepted the request to retreat. When they had ridden several metres, Jupiter turned around once more. The man in the robe who had shown them the tomb had stepped out of the chamber. Slightly averted, he spoke into a mobile phone while looking at the investigators with his head tilted. Inevitably Jupiter had the impression that the conversation was related to them, but perhaps he was just imagining things.

After a while, they returned to the place where they had started their camel journey. The First Investigator paid the guide and after a few minutes, Ali Eddine appeared and opened the doors of his taxi. "You Americans are fast... Have you seen everything?"

"No," said Bob, "but enough for now! To the Cairo Museum, please!"

According to Ali Eddine, the journey was a good thirty minutes and it would take them back to the centre of Cairo. Meanwhile in the taxi, Jupe whispered to his two friends about his findings.

"To me, it is clear what the second word is," he said. "We saw a statue of an owl there for guarding the protecting the dead, and in general, the owl symbolizes—"

"—Wisdom," Bob interrupted him.

"Exactly," Jupe remarked. "We now have the first two words—'Sphinx' and 'wisdom'."

"What about the carvings of the snake, scarab, and cat?" Pete asked.

"Well, according to the guide," Jupe said, "these three objects or amulets, I presume, are in the Cairo museum. The one that symbolizes immortality, resurrection, and transformation has to be the scarab. We are looking for a scarab amulet at the museum, fellas!"

Finally, Ali stopped in front of an iron gate surrounded by two police posts. There was a bunch of tourists from all over the world crowded there.

"If you are going to the museum, I can wait for you so you don't have to look for another taxi!" Ali said. "You can pay me for the whole day. That is much cheaper and I can show you a lot more of Cairo!"

Jupiter swayed his head. The proposal had something to offer. "One day—500 pounds!" he said.

"800 pounds, sir! All day!"

"600," said Jupiter.

Ali pulled a face and nodded. "Okay, okay... When will you be back?"

"Half an hour?"

"You Americans are fast..."

The Three Investigators bought their tickets and went into the forecourt, which was laid out with small stone walls on which tourists basked. A short time later, they entered the museum and stood there in awe. They had come into a large hall. Everywhere were statues, large and small, old coffins and their burial objects. They did not know where to look first.

"Oh my goodness! This place is huge. How are we going to find anything here?" Bob moaned and wiped the sweat from his brow.

After wandering back and forth aimlessly for a while, they decided to ask for help from one of the employees who was standing around to keep a watchful eye on the visitors.

"Sir, we are looking for a scarab amulet," Pete said to the man.

The man in uniform looked at him in astonishment.

"One in particular," Bob added.

"The scarab amulet from the 11th Tomb of the Priest," completed Jupiter. "Can you tell us where it is kept?"

"No speak English!" he said. "Wait!" The man pulled out a mobile phone, keyed in a number and spoke something in Arabic. Then he put his mobile away. "Wait!" he repeated.

After a while, another employee joined them and The Three Investigators repeated their request. Jupiter added that they had come a long way from high school in America to carry out their research assignment.

"The scarab from the new priest's tomb!" The man said. "So... if you will follow me..."

The investigators nodded happily. They were led up a staircase and then down a corridor until the man finally directed them into a small room where on the walls were hung posters of art exhibitions. The man asked them to wait and left the room smiling.

They had been waiting for at least a quarter of an hour, staring at the walls, when suddenly the door opened again. Another man entered. He had dark-hair, wore black-rimmed glasses and was a head shorter than Jupiter. In his left hand, he held an elongated cardboard box.

"Welcome to the Museum of Cairo! My name is Ibrahim Abaza. I am a curator here."

Jupiter introduced the three of them to Mr Abaza. Then the curator sat down with The Three Investigators and placed the box in front of him on the simple wooden table. Did it contain the scarab?

"And so you are interested in this particular scarab. This is very unusual!" Mr Abaza asked. "May I first ask why?"

Jupiter took the floor. "Well, we came across a book during a work for a project on ancient Egyptian amulets at our high school. Among other things, the newly discovered 11th Tomb of the Priest was described. Mr Abaza, it would be a great honour for us to see the original objects that were found in the tomb. We would also like to take a photo of the amulet and include it in our work."

Mr Abaza smiled. "Of course. So you're staying here at the dorm, I suppose?"

"No." Jupiter named the hotel.

"Three students from America staying in one of the best hotels in the city," said Mr Abaza thoughtfully.

Jupiter had realized too late how incredible this had to sound. "The school project has a generous donor," he replied with a quick reaction. "We are really enjoying the trip."

Mr Abaza leaned back. "Yes, certainly. Excuse me for being overly cautious. A few days ago, a strange man was here who was interested in the same scarab. If I wasn't careful, he would have stolen it."

Jupiter noticed. Did this have something to do with the story? "Stolen? That sounds exciting..." he tried to get a bit more out of Mr Abaza.

"He was an American, and he told me a strange story. Young gentlemen, there are still some crazy people coming here, hoping to get rich from undiscovered treasures from Egypt. And there are still rumours about a Chamber of Knowledge that is supposed to reveal the secret of the Sphinx."

"Surely these must be dreams of glory-seeking researchers," said Jupiter, to avoid arousing suspicion. "They must have found all the works of art and tombs by now."

"Actually there is no end to it," Mr Abaza slowly untied the cord around the box. "Fortunately, this scarab here was not stolen, but brought to us by a member of the

archaeological team that discovered the tomb.” He looked up and laughed. “Incidentally, there is one peculiarity about this amulet. Surely you’ve seen a photograph of this scarab before?”

“Yes,” Jupiter lied before anyone else could say anything. “Unfortunately there was not much to see in the photo. What peculiarity do you speak of?”

Mr Abaza had meanwhile removed the string from the box and lifted the lid with a smile.

7. Abduction Attempt!

Curious, The Three Investigators bent over the box. At the top were some papers and letters. Abaza took them out and put them aside. The scarab was covered in a soft cloth. It was about ten centimetres long. Mr Abaza took it out of the box and handed it to Bob, who sat closest to him. "You may hold it in your hand if you are careful."

Bob accepted the offer with a thoughtful nod. From Sir Leonard Dempsey's letter, he knew that what mattered was a clue to the next location. Slowly his fingertips slid across the surface. As he felt the grooves, he uttered a seemingly surprised call: "What is this?"

"That's the peculiarity I was talking about!" Mr Abaza adjusted his glasses. "It's an engraving. Well, we do not know how it came about, but it's a blemish on this work of art."

Bob looked at the engraving. It was a symbol for a mosque, with signs next to it. Somehow Bob noticed something strange about it. Mr Abaza had said that the engraving was peculiar, but it was the symbol that Bob found strange. Anyway, he kept his thoughts to himself for the time being. Smiling, he passed the amulet on to Jupiter, who tried to hide his interest in the engraving as much as possible.

"Mr Abaza, what was it about the strange man that could have stolen this amulet?" asked the First Investigator as casually as possible.

"He was an American by the name of Frank Dalbello..." Mr Abaza leafed through the papers that had been in the box. "He was a stubborn guy! He told me that he was looking for an explorer by the name of Sir Leonard. It seemed that Leonard had disappeared and Dalbello was on his trail. So he wanted to see all the documents I had on this Sir Leonard... but I had none. Meanwhile, he was taking a close look at this scarab amulet. Eventually I got rid of him. I don't think he was really after Leonard, but rather an old treasure. You can see it in that crazy flickering in his eyes!"

Pete's eyes went rigid and Mr Abaza laughed. "No, I was joking! Besides, Mr Dalbello was talking about a curse. But why are you interested in all this? You're not on the trail of one of those treasures, are you?"

"No," Jupiter said. "Like I said earlier, this is for our school project... I would like to take a photo of the scarab now, if I may."

"Of course." Mr Abaza smiled at him. "Usually these things cost money, but for students, I make an exception."

"Thank you." Jupiter took out his digital camera. He took a quick look at Bob, who understood him right away and distracted Mr Abaza with some trivial questions so that the curator could hardly notice that Jupiter mainly photographed the engraving on the back.

After a few photos, Jupiter stood up and happily kept the camera.

Then The Three Investigators thanked Mr Abaza for his help. The curator asked them to send him a copy of their school work. Bob promised.

Then Juve remembered something else important. "Did a certain person by the name of Rubbish... uh, George Cooper ever asked you about the scarab?"

"Cooper? No... I do not know anybody by that name." Mr Abaza did not need to think long. "No. I would have known. That Dalbello was the only one. Okay, I have to go back to work now," Abaza said resolutely and put the papers back in the box. "If there are no more

questions, I'll walk you out. Thank you for coming, and I wish you the best for your school project!"

When Mr Abaza had said goodbye in front of the museum, Jupiter looked triumphantly at his colleagues. The carving on the scarab had directed them to a mosque from where they could look for the third word.

The Three Investigators set out in good spirits to find Ali Eddine. It had taken them longer than they had planned. Presumably Ali found some new customers. On the other hand, they had not yet paid him.

When they stepped outside the iron gate, they were approached by another man. "Taxi?"

Jupiter fended him off and asked: "You sound... American? It's unusual that you operate a taxi here."

"I can arrange a taxi for you," said the man in a Southern American accent. He was strong, blond and wore sunglasses that covered his eyes. He bare his teeth and grinned at them like a radiator grille. "Come on!" he urged.

Jupiter wanted to say that they already had a taxi, but the words got stuck in his throat. A grey van had suddenly pulled up beside them and like lightning, the American had opened the back door. Jupiter received a strong blow that he slammed his head against the edge of the door. Then the American tried to push him inside the van.

"Hey, what is this!" Pete cried and wanted to come to the aid of his friend. But suddenly the man pulled out a gun. "Get in the car. All three of you... or something bad will happen to you!"

Bob, who was standing the furthest away from Jupiter, couldn't think of anything better than screaming for help, but it had an effect. Two Egyptian police officers at the police posts took notice of the matter. Curious, they walked towards the small crowd of people that had formed in the meantime. Jupiter took the chance and rushed out of the van.

"Damn!" cried the American. He put the gun back in his jacket and jumped into the van. With squealing tyres, the van shot into the street while the American was still closing the door.

"Whew!" The Three Investigators looked at each other.

It had all happened so quickly that they only now realized the danger they had just escaped from. They were to be abducted in the open street! But they had no time to think about it for long. The two Egyptian police officers were making their way to The Three Investigators, and they did not need a police interrogation now!

They ducked and squeezed through the crowd. A taxi shot up. The driver gestured wildly.

"Ali Eddine!" Pete cried in relief and opened the door.

The Three Investigators did not think twice. Seconds later, they were sitting in their seats and Ali stepped on the accelerator. Only when they had gone round a few corners further and Ali was sure that no one was following them did he slow down.

"You Americans have problems?" he asked and from the rear-view mirror, he looked at Jupiter who was silently rubbing his head. There was a strong bump growing there on the side of his forehead, just below his hairline.

"Trust me," said Ali. "I'll take you through Cairo. Stay with me and nothing will happen. Where do you want to go next?"

"Just drive up and down a few streets!" Jupiter asked him.

"Whatever Americans want..." Ali muttered.

Jupiter let go of his bump, took out the digital camera and opened the display. The close-up shots of the scarab had been very successful. The engraved mosque had a distinctive outline. Jupe knew it from an Egyptian coin and promptly said: "Please go to the Muhammad Ali Mosque!"

Ali nodded happily and changed lanes.

But how should they continue from there? There was something drawn next to the engraving of the mosque, but it was so fleeting that it could hardly be deciphered. Jupe scrolled back a few photos and zoomed closer. "Look. Next to the mosque there is a small cross. The best thing is to look for the spot and see further."

Then Bob whispered: "Fellas, there is something strange about the engraving."

"What is it?" Jupe asked.

"If that amulet was only recently discovered together with the tomb, then the mosque engraving had to be done after its discovery, not before," Bob said.

"What makes you think so?" Pete asked.

"Well," Bob explained. "If the scarab is from ancient Egypt, there were no mosques then. In fact, there were no such buildings of this design from that era."

"You're right!" Jupe remarked. "Good observation, Bob."

"Now if the engraving was done after the amulet's discovery," Bob continued, "how would the authorities allow such actions? It's actually defacing an artefact. This is mighty suspicious to me."

"You're right again, Bob," Jupe said. "Anyway, it points to us the mosque, so we have to go there and look for the third word."

"What does the letter say again?" Pete asked.

Bob took the magazine from Jupe and turned to the relevant part of the letter:

*It will direct you to the next location, where you find a word at the southern viewpoint.
That is the third word...*

While Ali Eddine was cruising the streets, The Three Investigators recovered from their fright. But their thoughts kept returning to the scene outside the museum.

"Why should someone want to abduct us," whispered Pete, so soft that Ali did not hear him.

"Because that someone knows that we are looking for the treasure," Bob replied.

"Who?" Pete asked.

Bob shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. But I think I know who that American was!"

"Frank Dalbello!" Jupiter said.

"Yes, of course," hissed Bob. "He is the rival of Sir Leonard Dempsey. You remember, he wrote about his competitor, a certain Frank, who was also on the trail of the chamber and this is the same man that was turned away by Mr Abaza. However, he never gave up looking for the chamber. Somewhere he must have got wind that we're on track! But who gave him the tip?"

"The Egyptian man in the Tomb of the Priest," Jupiter said and he was annoyed in retrospect at their negligence. "It struck me that he was on the phone as soon as we had left the tomb. He also saw us reading the letter. They are probably working together!"

"And now the American is chasing us!" Bob turned around and looked through the rear window. The drivers in the cars behind them were not familiar.

"Please drive a little faster," Jupiter asked.

Ali laughed. "Faster—in this traffic? I do my best, mister."

After the attempted abduction, Juve realized that they had stirred up a hornet's nest. But what he still didn't understand was what role did Rubbish-George play in the story? Had he previously been an ally of Dalbello?

In the meantime, the road had risen and gave The Three Investigators a view of the roofs of the buildings in Cairo. Up the slope was a large stone fortress, which was enthroned over the city.

"The Citadel of Cairo," Ali explained and drove as close as he could. "There is the Muhammad Ali Mosque in the complex. I'll drop you off but I am not coming with you. Have to pay an entrance fee." He laughed. "How long will it take you? One hour?"

Jupiter looked at his watch. There was still some time before Layla landed in Cairo. They could devote themselves to the puzzle in peace. "One hour is okay," he said. "Will you wait here for us?"

Ali Eddine nodded. "Of course, my American friends!"

8. Americans!

As soon as they got out of the taxi, The Three Investigators went up to the citadel and bought the tickets.

“Do you think we can trust Ali Eddine?” Pete asked.

“After all, he helped us just now,” Bob replied.

“Perhaps he is pursuing his own interests,” Jupiter said. “We must be vigilant, but changing the taxi driver also poses a risk. Who knows who will take care of us?”

It was not difficult to find the mosque. The bright large building was located on the edge of the mountain and was immediately recognizable by the two elegant cylindrical minarets. The three boys sat down in the shade of the wall that bordered the citadel.

Jupiter was still in treasure hunting fever. “Maybe we can still present the solution to Layla when we meet her at the airport.” He pulled up his T-shirt, opened the red bag, pulled out the magazine and started to read the letter again.

“Oh, great!” Pete replied. “Come, Bob, let’s go and have some ice cream while Jupe reads the letter yet again!”

“Come on, Pete,” Jupe said. “We are down to the third and last word. Perhaps it’s at where the cross is marked on the engraving, and the letter says it’s at the southern viewpoint! Why not we just go there right now. I expect to find the last word there.”

They each drank some water and then walked along the side of the mosque until they came to a parapet, behind which the path went steeply downhill. Against the magnificent backdrop of Cairo, a man was taking a photo of his beautiful companion, who had sat down on the wall for this.

The Three Investigators hoped that both would go away soon so that they could start their search. Since there was no end to the photography, The Three Investigators leaned over the stone wall and looked into the distance.

A wonderful view of Cairo opened up to them. The city lay at their feet like a brown sea of houses, breathing in the mist of the traffic pulsing through the streets. Far away, the pyramids shone in the sun. When they turned away, the couple had gone.

At last, the investigators were able to systematically search the wall. It didn’t take long before Bob found something.

“Here it is!” Excitedly, he waved his friends to him. “A scarab carved into the wall... and there are some Arabic characters next to it...”

“No idea what they mean,” muttered Jupiter, who otherwise always knew everything. But even Jupiter’s mastermind could not master all the languages of the world. He took out his camera and photographed the spot. Bob pulled out his notepad and copied the writing as accurately as possible as a back-up.

Then Jupiter signalled for departure. “Before Layla arrives, maybe we can still make the next stop! We just need someone we can trust to translate the words for us. Perhaps we can ask Ali.”

“You are simply incorrigible,” Pete muttered weakly and reluctantly set himself in motion.

They walked along the mosque and crossed a square. When they turned around in front of an administrative building to take a last look at the impressive mosque, The Three Investigators could not believe their eyes.

“That’s...” stuttered Pete, “the abductor at the museum! Frank Dalbello!”

“This can’t be a coincidence,” Bob hissed in horror. “He’s following us!”

The man was clearly visible among the tourists. He was accompanied by a second man, who was apparently Egyptian. Perhaps he was the man who had driven the van in the earlier abduction attempt. When the men realized that they had been seen, they ran after The Three Investigators.

“Run!” cried Jupiter. “They want the letter!”

The Three Investigators took off. Bob was fast, but Pete had already overtaken him after a few metres. Panting, the First Investigator tried to keep up, but the pursuers kept coming closer.

“Wait for me,” Jupiter moaned. It was hot and he was thirsty. It was a desperate situation, but he had to hold out.

They rushed along the wall of the mosque. There was an opening around the middle.

“In there!” cried Jupiter.

Pete and Bob stopped. “In there?”

“Yes!”

A few men and women were taking off their shoes. It was forbidden to enter the mosque with shoes on. But when Jupiter had caught up with Pete and Bob, The Three Investigators ran into the saving darkness without paying any further attention.

Inside, they paused briefly to orientate themselves. Many visitors sat on the carpets on the floor and admired the hall. The sour smell of sweaty feet drew into their noses—the children of a school class with trainers in their hands had to be responsible for it.

Suddenly shouts rang out and Jupiter turned around. A few men pointed at the three of them. One man ordered something and his companions started to move.

“Go!” cried Jupiter.

Suddenly their pursuers came from all sides.

Astonishingly deft, Jupiter circled around a few of the men, escaped their quick grips, and Pete and Bob followed on his heels.

“What do they want?” Pete yelled to Juve.

“Perhaps we haven’t taken off our shoes,” Jupiter cried, cutting his way through the innumerable hands that tried to grab him. “I hope they will forgive us. It is an emergency after all!”

Juve fought his way further through the rapidly growing crowd until he simply couldn’t go on. Hands grabbed him and shortly afterwards, they got Bob and Pete as well.

An incredible babble of voices descended upon them. They were surrounded by at least thirty or forty men and boys, who were angry with them. There were a few chunks of English among them and The Three Investigators heard something like ‘damn Americans’. The people pushed them forward. The Three Investigators did not resist.

Satisfied, Jupiter noticed how their two pursuers tried in vain to squeeze through the crowd. In the midst of the outraged locals, they simply had no chance. The three of them were pushed towards another exit and were rudely ejected under loud insults.

Immediately they ran on. The action had given them a few metres lead. The two pursuers appeared. They were on socks so that didn’t give them the speed they had before in their shoes, which they still held in their hands.

Bob ran ahead and luckily found his way to the exit of the citadel. The Three Investigators pushed through the tourists in the entrance area and rushed down the long driveway to the street.

Far in front, Ali stood next to his car and waited for them. A few metres further on, Frank Dalbello's grey van was parked.

When Ali noticed The Three Investigators, he ripped open the door.

"What if Ali Eddine does work with these guys after all?" Bob brought up between several puffs of breath. "How did we actually get involved with him?"

"He offered his taxi to us," said Pete, who—trained as he was—was still breathing most evenly.

"Never mind," gasped Jupiter. "We don't have a choice now!"

They reached their destination and threw themselves on the back of the old Peugeot. Ali got behind the wheel and pointed to the two pursuers who were meanwhile running down the driveway. "You have problems, Americans?"

"Don't ask! Quickly drive off!" Jupiter ordered.

Ali started the engine, but did not move yet. "Where to?"

The pursuers came closer and closer.

"Anywhere, just go!" Jupe yelled.

Ali turned around and frowned. As soon as the American reached the taxi and tried to open the back door, Ali stepped on the accelerator. Relieved, Pete and Bob watched through the rear window as the two men ran to their van.

Ali switched to the middle lane. "Where to, Americans?"

"We have to go to the Khan el-Khalili bazaar, but for the time being, drive criss-cross through the city. We have to lose our pursuers," Jupiter wheezed.

That was not excessive caution because, as Pete and Bob noticed, the two men had meanwhile jumped into the van and started chasing the taxi.

Ali Eddine raced along the main road for a short time, then he turned into a side street with squealing tyres. Fruit stalls lined the roadside and many people were shopping. There were no tourists here. Ali sounded the horn, but the pursuers, who had free rein, came closer and closer.

"Faster!" cried Jupiter.

They reached one of the main roads again and Jupiter stopped breathing. There was a traffic jam.

Ali squeezed his taxi into the next best gap but had to stop. A couple of cars pushed themselves between them and their pursuers. There was nothing going on in front. Ali thought about it for a moment, accelerated and had his right tyres go along the pavement for a while to overtake a few cars. Bystanders jumped to the side, then Ali had to cut back into the road because a sales stall was blocking the way.

The pursuers tried to do the same. Meanwhile Ali pressed the horn continuously. A few drivers were accommodating and moved a little to the side. He drove a few metres forward. Then it was over. Everything was at a standstill.

"He's coming!" cried Pete. The blond man had left the van, which was also squeezed between cars, and made his way towards them between the blocked cars. His hand held a gun.

"Do something, Ali!" yelled Jupiter.

Ali grabbed the wheel and stepped on the accelerator. He had discovered a way out. The Three Investigators fervently hoped that the road would lead out the other side. The Peugeot shot into the dark driveway, thundered into a courtyard seconds later and Ali hit the brakes.

There were boxes, hand carts, and people who were startled. Finally, there was a wall. They were trapped!

9. Taxi, Taxi

A few seconds later, Dalbello dashed through the driveway. When the American spotted the taxi of The Three Investigators, he slowed down and raised his gun. Carefully and with a satisfied grin on his face, he stepped towards the vehicle. "Get out!"

The local bystanders, who had been negotiating over a wagon load of chickens, retreated with a mixture of fear and curiosity.

Pete, on whose side the American had stopped, carefully opened the door and got out. Bob followed, then Jupiter squeezed himself out of the car.

"You too," Dalbello said and pointed the gun at Ali.

"Okay, sir, no problem!" Under the gaze of the bystanders, Ali got out of his taxi.

The American made a gesture with his gun and directed the taxi driver into the line of the bystanders. Then he turned to Jupiter. "The red bag, please!"

Jupiter flinched. He had not expected this.

"The red bag! Quick!"

Jupiter fumbled with the bag under his T-shirt to deliberately delay taking it out.

"Hurry up, fat boy! And if you have a copy of the letter, destroy it! Stay out of this! Or you won't live to see another day! Remember, here in Cairo you can suddenly disappear... and never to be seen again!"

That was a cold threat. Now Jupiter was holding the bag in his hands. Of course, he possessed a copy of the letter. It was in the side pocket of the suitcase that was lying in the hotel room. As a result, he could hand over the original if necessary, but suddenly he became insecure. Maybe the paper contained some kind of secret code, something he had missed because he hadn't looked for it... or perhaps there was something written in invisible ink, which would not be readable on the copy. He hesitated.

"Mr Dalbello," he began.

At that moment, something crashed loudly on the ground and immediately, excited and loud screeching noises came up. Ali Eddine had knocked over the chicken wagon. The impact had opened the flaps and the birds fluttered wildly through the courtyard. For a moment, everyone was distracted. Only Ali was not! He jumped at Jupiter, tore the bag from his hand and ran off. Before The Three Investigators knew it, he had slipped into the delivery entrance of a restaurant.

The American was the first to react and wanted to pursue, but the bystanders had crowded together in front of the entrance and formed a wall of people. When Dalbello realized that it was pointless, he ran back through the driveway to the street to find a way to catch the fugitive. But precious seconds had passed.

The bystanders watched him, then scattered, chattering and trying to catch the escaped chickens. Two men put the wooden wagon back in place. No one paid any attention to The Three Investigators anymore.

The boys looked at each other. "And now what?" Pete asked trembling.

Jupiter had disappointment written all over his face. "We will wait for Ali. We have no other choice."

"What if he doesn't come back?" Pete asked.

“Then we have to go back to the hotel by another way,” Jupe decided. “I urgently need to secure the copy of the letter! And then we’ll go to the airport!”

As if he had heard the last words, an Egyptian suddenly approached. “Taxi, Americans?”

Jupiter shook his head. “We are waiting for Ali Eddine.”

“Ali Eddine not here. Come with me,” the man said.

Jupiter shook his head.

“Yes. Good price. And is better that way! American will come back for you.”

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders, helplessness spoke from Pete’s eyes, and Bob finally said: “Okay. Why not. Then please take us to the hotel!” Bob gave the address.

The man nodded happily and went to the taxi. “Please...”

“But that’s Ali Eddine’s car!” Bob rebelled.

“The key is there,” the man calmly replied. “Ali will get his taxi back later.”

Shaking their heads, The Three Investigators took their seats. At that moment, they did not care, in fact, they did not even understand anything anymore. The man got behind the wheel and reversed the car through the driveway back to the street.

The traffic on the main road had cleared up only slightly, but at least they were now moving forward slowly. Fortunately, there was no sign of the grey van that had been following them.

During the journey, The Three Investigators did not talk much. They had to digest the shock first. When their new driver finally let the taxi roll out in front of the hotel, there was only a good hour left until Layla arrived—and the airport was far outside the city.

“Can you wait here and then drive us straight to the airport?” Jupiter asked. “We just need to get something from our room quickly.”

The driver nodded. “Sure, Americans. I will wait.”

The Three Investigators got out and immersed themselves in the orderly world of the hotel. Guests waited at the long counter to check in, bellboys rolled suitcases up to the rooms and two businessmen sat at a table reading the *Financial Times*.

As The Three Investigators hurried through the lobby, the excitement that this strange city had given them fell away a little, but not the disappointment with the latest events.

Pete in particular had to cope with the defeat. “What will Layla say to all this! She wanted us to wait for her! And now we’re empty-handed!”

“We have a copy of the letter,” Jupiter reassured him. “We will get it now. All is not lost yet!”

“That is if Ali does not beat us to the solution of the puzzle! He has taken his chance,” Pete excitedly shouted. “As it is, Mr Dalbello will not find the Chamber of Knowledge and neither will we. Ali will have the last laugh.”

“If Ali is after the treasure, he must still solve the puzzle,” said Jupiter. “I admit that Ali surprised me! I bet our pursuer is still looking for him in vain!”

A door opened automatically in front of them and they entered the inner garden. Some of the guests sat outside enjoying their drinks. Without paying any attention to them, The Three Investigators crossed the grounds and hurried to get to the outbuilding where their room was.

As they took the stairs to the first floor, Jupiter took out the code card for the door. But when they reached room number 3542, he hesitated and pointed to the door frame.

“Signs of burglary...” he said.

The other two flinched. The tracks were really clear.

“Somebody’s been tampering the door with a crowbar!” They paused and listened.

“Beware,” Bob warned. “I think that guy is still in our room!”

Footsteps could be heard, followed by the brief rattling of a zip opening quickly.

“The burglar is rummaging through our things,” whispered Pete. “Come on! We’ll catch him! Surprise is on our side!”

Jupiter nodded. Carefully he pressed on the door, and it immediately moved. The sounds on the other side faded away.

“Now!” Juve shouted.

One by one, The Three Investigators stormed into the room. Jupiter saw a shadow caught in the blowing curtains. With a hard arm movement, the man freed himself, and in the next moment, he was already on the balcony and writhing over the railing.

“After him!” Juve shouted.

The Three Investigators ran on at the same time and Bob and Jupiter collided with each other, causing them to fall lengthwise. But Pete was in front. He jumped over an openly lying suitcase and raced directly towards the balcony. There was no trace of the man. Pete leaned over the railing and just saw the burglar running around the corner of the building.

“Bummer!” he gasped.

In the meantime, Bob and Jupiter had reached the balcony.

“He’s gone!” Pete said disappointed. “But I think I recognized him! He is the man that was with Dalbello! How did he know where we are staying? How did get here so fast?”

“Dalbello!” Jupiter grabbed his head. “The copy of the letter!” he shouted and hurried back into the room.

His suitcase lay open on the floor. Hopefully they had disturbed the burglar soon enough! With trembling fingers, Jupiter looked for the zip on the inside of the suitcase lid. But after only a few seconds, he saw the disaster—the lining was ripped open!

“He stole the copy,” Jupiter said and his throat became dry.

Jupiter could remember the directions stated in the letter, but apart from Pete, Bob and him, Ali and Dalbello were now also on the trail.

The Three Investigators were dejected when they went back downstairs. They urgently needed to get to the airport. If Layla’s plane was on time, they would be late. Therefore, they postponed reporting the break-in at the reception until later.

They left the hotel and searched for their taxi driver, who was waiting a short distance away. He waved them over and led them to the vehicle. The Three Investigators sat in the back seat and brooded silently for the first few minutes of the ride. Jupiter knew that Pete was angry with him because he had insisted starting the search earlier today.

Pete only needed to look at his friend’s trembling lower lip and he realized how hard Juve was taking the defeat and that it would only make him more defiant. And both of them could tell by Bob’s face that he was really annoyed that he was now being used again to ensure good weather between his two friends.

“I just don’t feel like cheering you up!” Bob said. He too could read the minds of his friends, as he knew them long enough to do so. Grumpily, he looked out the side window. They had just passed a marketplace.

They had actually left Rocky Beach to help Rubbish-George. Did his disappearance really have something to do with the mystery? Then they are really in a fix now. Without the magazine, they might have been missing a crucial clue.

Bob looked at his watch. To make matters worse, the traffic was still heavy. The taxi was slow, even on the viaduct road. Hopefully Layla would wait for them.

They left the viaduct and turned onto another main road. Bob recognized the place from their earlier ride to the city. They rolled on for a while when the driver suddenly turned off

again.

“Sir! That’s not the way to the airport!” Jupiter was also paying attention.

The driver nodded. “I know. Surprise, Americans!”

“We do not want any more surprises!” Jupiter got nervous. What was that all about? The taxi was now driving through a busy residential street. “We’d like to go to the airport, please, sir!”

“In a moment, mister. It’s only a few minutes.”

The Three Investigators looked at each other. The car turned off again. The area became more and more eerie.

“Please turn around now!” Jupe said.

“Yes, Americans!”

Jupiter thought in a flash. Was this a trap? Should they take the next opportunity to flee? The car was going too fast for them to throw themselves out of it. But they had to do something!

Then the driver braked and steered the taxi into a dark driveway. The driver turned to them and grinned. “Look, Americans!”

A person came out of the darkness of the driveway. Slowly he walked towards the car. The investigators’ hairs stood on end... until Bob suddenly recognized the person.

“Ali Eddine?” It was him.

“Hello, my American friends!”

The other Egyptian got out and let Ali Eddine get behind the wheel again. The two exchanged a few words in Arabic. Then the man who had driven them here waved at them briefly and left through the driveway.

Ali turned around and suddenly The Three Investigators saw the red bag in his hand. “Here, Americans. Your football magazine! Ali saved it!”

Surprised, Jupiter accepted the bag and checked the contents. The letter was there!

“*Shukran!*” he said contentedly. “A thousand *shukran!*”

Pete and Bob looked at him in astonishment. “What did you say?”

“*Shukran* means ‘thanks’ in Arabic,” Jupiter remarked as a matter of course and looked ahead. “Please go to the airport, we are in a hurry...” Now that they were back in the game, his bad mood had suddenly disappeared into thin air.

But they were late. Pete remembered his mobile phone and sent a text message to Layla saying that they were on their way, but there was no reply. Although Ali made every effort, they did not reach the airport until after the flight’s arrival time.

Ali stopped his car at the side of the road and The Three Investigators asked him to wait. Then the three of them got out and hurried into the airport building. Hopefully Layla had not yet left on her own.

While Bob and Jupiter searched the arrival hall, Pete found a woman wearing an American T-shirt waiting at the lost luggage counter and asked her if she was on the plane from Paris. She nodded and said: “Most of the passengers are long gone!”

When Pete turned around again, he couldn’t see Bob and Jupiter. Apparently they had gone somewhere else. He backtracked the way he came and started looking around, but he discovered no trace of his friends. When he went back to the entrance hall, he decided to call Layla on his mobile phone again, but that’s when he saw her—Layla was walking towards the exit a good fifty metres away. Next to her was a man whom he could not recognize from behind.

Pete kept the mobile phone, ran and crashed into a child he must have overlooked. As he stumbled, he just realized that the man who was with Layla suddenly grabbed her by the arm

and dragged her outside. She resisted. Was she being abducted?

Pete got up and ran after them. Now they were outside and out of his sight. But a few seconds later, Pete had reached the door and ran outside. There was the grey van!

The man had just climbed through the rear door and pulled it shut from the inside. Layla was obviously already trapped. The van started to move. Without thinking, Pete sprinted off.

The van started to move slowly at first, and Pete came closer bit by bit. He saw the running board at the rear of the van and also a grab handle. But gradually the van gained momentum. Pete gave it his best. When he was close enough, he jumped. He grabbed the handle with his hand and almost at the same time his foot stepped on the board. Luckily, the driver did not see him from the side mirrors.

Pete gasped for air. Behind him something dropped out into the road. The mobile phone! Looking back, he noticed Jupiter and Bob running out of the airport building. Then the van turned around a corner and he didn't see them anymore.

The distances at which he changed hands to hold on to the handle became shorter and shorter. It was exhausting. Even his feet had hardly any room on the running board. In every right-hand bend, Pete had balance problems. Every now and then, a car honked behind him and people waved at him. Pete regularly grinned back and hoped that the driver of the van would not notice the fuss he was causing.

In the beginning, he had heard sounds from inside the van that suggested an altercation, but in the meantime, everything was quiet. The abductor had probably tied up Layla. What was the meaning of all this? Although he hadn't really recognized the man from a distance, Pete suspected that it had been Dalbello's companion who had intercepted Layla.

The van was a clear clue. It was clear to Pete that Dalbello and his goons were determined to prevent anyone other than themselves from finding the Chamber of Knowledge. One of the them had broken into the hotel room of The Three Investigators. But how did the men know about Layla? Pete couldn't figure it out. Had The Three Investigators given themselves away? Pete thought hard about what they had talked about when they were sitting at the wall of the mosque. Apparently the pursuers had overheard them there... or somewhere else.

Pete looked around. Ali Eddine had earlier driven them for quite a while around Cairo. He knew that the area the van had turned into was in the outskirts of the city. Now it went through grey-brown houses. But before Pete could think about it, the vehicle turned off again and went into a maze of roads leading through many flat, run-down dwellings, most of which resembled makeshift shelters rather than houses.

Pete was sure where he was. Ali had told them something about this place on their trip to the mosque. It was the cemetery in Cairo—the City of the Dead!

10. The City of the Dead

The City of the Dead, also known as the Cairo Necropolis, had been developed over many centuries. It was a huge Islamic cemetery which, unlike the cemeteries Pete knew from home, consisted of individual plots of land, each of them containing tombs of the same family. Some were mausoleums of historical rulers and elites, and the rest were tombs of Cairo's common people. Interestingly, people lived and worked amongst the tombs.

Pete felt as if he had immersed himself in another world. From one moment to the next, the lively hubbub of Cairo had disappeared from him, as if the dead were protecting themselves from all the hustle and bustle. But even this impression dissolved, and every now and then, the silent image of the roads was interrupted by an old woman stepping out of the house, children playing around, or a taxi carrying both curious and suspicious tourists.

What did the abductors intend to do with Layla? The van made a few more turns. Pete was desperately looking out for landmarks and road signs, but many of them were in Arabic. Finally, the van stopped next to one of the small entrances to the house by the side of the road. A few children who had been playing football in the road ran away. Now it was time to be quick.

With one glance, Pete assessed the surroundings, jumped onto the road and scurried back. He couldn't hide in the entrance where the van was parked as that was where the abductors would probably take Layla. So he chose the neighbouring house on his right. Here too, the entrance was open and Pete slipped in.

He came into a kind of anteroom. Carefully, Pete peered out into the road and kept his eye on the van. He was not mistaken—the American had just opened the back door of the car and shortly afterwards, the Egyptian came out of the van with Layla. She couldn't see anything because she was blindfolded. Her hands were tied. Seconds later, they disappeared into the house.

That's when Pete was found. Unnoticed by him, a simply dressed young man came from inside the house, and addressed him in Arabic.

Pete did not understand a word. "I... I just happened to be here," he stuttered. "Do you have a glass of water?"

The man switched to English. "Tourist? American? I can show you around. You want to see my house? The tomb?"

Suddenly, two children came up to the man, and as soon as they saw Pete, they started babbling.

"I... I..." Pete continued to stammer. Why did they all make such a noise here? That could alert Dalbello! Pete felt that he could no longer control the situation.

He took off and ran into the road. It was best to hide behind the van. At that moment, Dalbello stepped out of the house. The man spotted him, and he hesitated for a moment. "I know you!" he shouted.

Pete tried to avoid him. With two steps, the American was with Pete and pushed him to the ground. Pete was anything but weak, but he couldn't do anything against this giant of a man.

Seconds later, the American had out-manoeuvred Pete into the flat house where the other man welcomed him. Before Pete knew it, his hands were tied. With a firm grip, he was led into the courtyard of the house, in the middle of which stood a stone chest. He became dizzy. Surely he would not...

The top of the chest was a stone slab cover that had been pushed to the side. The American enlarged the opening. Then both men lifted Pete up and lowered him in. Horrified, the Second Investigator landed on the bottom and looked around in panic. The cavity under the chest was larger than Pete had suspected. He could almost stand. It crunched under his feet. Were these the bones of the dead? With a scratching sound, the heavy slab cover above him closed.

A few last rays of sunlight fell in and that's when Pete saw Layla. She was sitting on the side of the ground, still blindfolded, fully concentrated on what she was hearing.

"Layla, it's me, Pete," he said. "It looks like we have a problem."

"We're too late!" Desperately, Jupiter slapped his hands in front of his face. Bob stared at the van and could not believe it.

Somewhere at the airport, they had lost sight of Pete. They had wandered around the building for a while, then suddenly they had seen Pete sprinting out of the entrance hall at full speed. And now he clung to the grey van, which Jupiter easily identified as Mr Dalbello's vehicle. A few seconds later, it had gone behind an airport building.

Jupiter stared for a moment at the point where he had last seen Pete, then he let his gaze wander back along the road. "There's something on the road, Bob!" he said and set himself in motion with determination. "Quick! Before another car drives over it!"

A taxi approached and Bob waved the driver away. Jupiter had already run onto the road, bent down and picked something up. The taxi evaded him honking, but Jupiter hardly cared.

A few moments later, Jupiter proudly presented his friend with what he had found—their mobile phone!

"Did Pete drop it on purpose?" Bob asked at a loss.

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. "No idea. Very strange, the whole thing... and it was extremely unusual for Pete to voluntarily put himself in a dangerous situation." Jupiter pinched his lower lip. "This can only mean that... he has found Layla," the First Investigator deduced. "Even more, she was probably abducted by Dalbello after her arrival! That would be a reason for Pete to intervene!"

Bob looked at his friend in admiration. He could only agree with him. "Let's go to our taxi," he shouted. "With a lot of luck, we might just catch them."

As fast as they could, Jupiter and Bob ran to the place where Ali had let them off... but the car was not there. With a mixture of desperation and surprise, they looked around. Again and again, other taxis drove past, but Ali's car was not among them.

After a few minutes, Bob pushed Jupiter to the side. He had a suspicion. "Ali Eddine is looking for the treasure as well!" he said. "Can we really trust him? He may have saved your red bag, but it was in his possession and with a little curiosity he will—"

"—Have looked in it," Jupiter completed the sentence. "After Ali snatched the bag from me, he would have found the football magazine. From it, he would have known what we are after!"

"If we're unlucky, he read the letter and went on a search," Bob said.

Bob was right. Jupiter looked at him annoyed. They were alone, and Jupiter had the feeling that everything was slipping away from them.

After the stone slab cover was closed, everything was dark. A thousand thoughts flashed through Pete's mind, and he felt a mixture of rage at his own stupidity, fear of what was to come, longing for Jupiter and Bob, but he was also relieved that he was not alone.

He sat down on the ground and slid closer to Layla. Too annoyed that she couldn't speak, and he didn't know how to handle it, so he just started babbling. Confessing that The Three Investigators had already begun to solve the puzzle, he told her about their visit to the 11th Tomb of the Priest near the pyramids, about his interesting meeting with Mr Abaza and his unpleasant encounter with Dalbello and his crony. When he described the circumstances under which they had fled the mosque, he even laughed a little. Every now and then, Layla made noises that he could not interpret.

They were tied up. Sure... Why hadn't he thought of that right away! He sat with his back against Layla so that they could reach the knots of the shackles with their fingers. But no matter how hard they tried, they just couldn't get the fasteners of the plastic straps open. When all this failed, Layla abandoned the plan and slid restlessly back and forth as if she wanted to tell him something. Pete remained sitting quietly and waited.

After a while, Layla had brought herself into a position where she lay directly behind Pete. She rubbed her hip against his hands and Pete felt with his fingers. There was her trouser pocket and something solid was stuck inside there. Pete tried to pull it out. In the process, the plastic band had cut deep into his skin. It hurt quite a bit. It took minutes, then he had finally done it. He felt the object. Longish, firm, with keys. It had to be Layla's talking device, Talky!

Layla turned on her side so that her hands came close to Pete's and she could grab the device. Pete waited. He heard her tapping the keys.

"Thanks! That's more like it," sounded the voice of Talky.

"Oh yeah!" Pete was amazed. "I forgot that you can hit the letters without looking!"

"Yes, as often as I type them... I can do it without looking. I know exactly which letters, numbers and functions are on which key."

"Layla... I've always wanted to ask you... why are you mute?"

The response was delayed. "As a child, I was involved in an accident. I do not want to talk about it... Who abducted us?"

Pete responded to the change of topic. "Frank Dalbello, the tomb raider, and his Egyptian buddy. They do not want us to find the Chamber of Knowledge!"

"Do you know where we are?" asked Layla.

"In the City of the Dead. We drove through streets and roads. I can't tell you where exactly."

Layla's Talky was silent. "I'll get help," she suddenly typed in.

With a jerk, Pete sat up straight again. "How? We have problems untying ourselves."

Layla emitted a noise that sounded almost like a laugh. "My Talky has a mobile phone function," she then said. "I can send a message with it!"

"Sure." In Pete's head, two thoughts merged into one. "Then send the message to my mobile. If we're lucky, Jupiter and Bob found it and they can save us!"

"Okay. I will write to them first. Then I will also inform my mother! Hopefully we have a connection here."

"The slab cover of the tomb is not that thick," said Pete, "and above it is the open sky."

"Okay," Layla said. "Can you give me a more detailed description of this place?"

"I only know that the house up there is painted white, but there are many here," Pete said. "Wait... outside the house, there are children playing football with tin cans as goal posts."

"The City of the Dead is a huge place," Layla said. "Can you remember any road names or sign boards near here... something more specific?"

"I did look at them but most of them are in Arabic," Pete replied. "Uh... wait! I recalled a major street sign that I could read... 'Khond' something... K-H-O-N-D. I couldn't pronounce the second word."

"Khond Tolosyan?" Layla said.

"Yes! Yes!" Pete exclaimed. "It was something like that. We are at a side road off that main street."

"That's good enough. We're in the Northern Cemetery," Layla said. "Is the van still outside?"

"It was there when they caught me," Pete said.

She wrote and Talky voiced out the words: "Hello! Pete and I have been abducted. We are locked in a tomb in the City of the Dead Northern Cemetery at a side road off Khond Tolosyan. The house is white and in the road in front of it, children are playing football with tin cans as goal posts. Perhaps the grey van is still outside. Help us!"

Pete noted in amazement that she hadn't mistyped a single word. Then he gave Layla the mobile phone number, and she sent the message. She sent a similar message to her mother.

"Now, we'll have to wait," said Layla.

In the meantime, at least ten taxi drivers had asked Jupiter and Bob if they could take them to the city, but the two investigators were still standing undecidedly at the airport, thinking things over.

What should they do? The only thing they now had was the letter of Leonard Dempsey. They did not know where Pete was, and where Ali was. However, they suspected that Layla had been abducted in the grey van. Of course, they could go back to the hotel and wait to see if Pete called. But what if he was in danger? Maybe it made sense for them to inform the Egyptian police. But what could they tell them—two foreigners with a confused story about treasure hunters who were on a mysterious search for the secret of the Sphinx.

So the third option was to continue the search for the chamber. All they were missing was the translation of the Arabic characters. It would lead them to a shop in the great bazaar Khan el-Khalili. There they would meet the agent who would take them to the Chamber of Knowledge, if they cite the secret phrase correctly.

But without Pete, they could not proceed with the mission, at least not until they knew if he was out of danger. The problem was, how could they start their search for Pete? If they had been in Rocky Beach now, they could have called Inspector Cotta and asked him for information on the grey van. But they were not at home where they knew their way around.

Suddenly, Jupiter remembered Mr Abaza, the man from the museum. Maybe he knew more about Frank Dalbello, so that they could get on his trail and get to Pete and Layla. Jupiter and Bob decided to go to the museum.

A short time later, they were again sitting in a taxi and rolling towards the city. The traffic was flowing and after half an hour, they reached their destination. Just as Jupiter was about to pay for the tickets, the mobile phone buzzed in Bob's pocket. As if electrified, Bob pulled the device out and pressed a few buttons.

It was a text message. He read the message and turned pale. "A text message from Layla!" he said and handed Jupiter the mobile phone.

The First Investigator only took a quick look. “We have to change plans!” he said. “We must save Pete and Layla!”

The taxi turned off to the Northern Cemetery. Jupiter pulled his hair up. The area seemed so confusing to him. He asked the taxi driver to go along Khond Tolosyan, which was one of the bigger streets there. On reaching there, he asked the driver to systematically drive around the side roads. The driver laughed. Systematically—that was something like introducing fixed prices at a bazaar in Cairo. But he promised that he would try his best.

A strange oppressive silence lay in the roads. Most of the flat houses were very old with walls that were crumbling. From dark window holes, curious eyes cast suspicious looks at the taxi and its passengers, and the driver asked the investigators if he could arrange for them to look inside one of the tombs. Bob and Jupiter were uneasy about this, not to mention the fact that they had quite different concerns.

Just as the taxi turned around a corner, Jupiter and Bob flinched at the same time. They saw a car parked at the side of the road, and it looked quite similar to Ali Eddine’s Peugeot. It was empty. When they spotted the sticker with the Sphinx on the rear window of the car, they were sure—Ali was here! This could not be a coincidence. Somehow he was involved in the case!

Jupiter asked the driver to stop behind Ali’s car. They paid and got out. A little further up the road, Bob spotted several tin cans by the side of the street. “The football goal posts! That’s what Layla mentioned. This must be it, Juve!”

They crept forward until they came to a white house. Carefully, Jupiter peered into the gate-like entrance. His gaze fell into an abandoned, gloomy room, into which a lonely ray of sunlight penetrated through the gap of a door on the side.

“Come,” Jupiter whispered and they crept inside. Soon, they found another door to go into the backyard.

A soft groan came to them, followed by a strange scraping sound. They crept up to the door and peered into the backyard. In the centre of the backyard stood a stone chest. A man was tampering with the cover. It was Ali Eddine.

“Let’s get him!” Jupiter whispered and in several quick steps, they were with him. Jupiter grabbed Ali while Bob jumped at his neck. With a choking sound, Ali slumped to the ground.

“What have you done to Pete?” Bob cried as he grabbed Ali’s collar.

Ali gasped for breath. “Americans!” it came out in a rush, “Americans! Wait! I just want to save Pete!”

Bob loosened his grip. “What?”

“Pete was caught! And a girl! I followed them!”

Bob looked at Jupiter and Jupiter looked at Bob. Finally, they loosened their grips completely. Ali picked himself up and brushed off the dust.

“Mister, I help you and you attack me! Have I ever let you down?”

“You wanted to save Pete?” Bob asked.

“Yes! At the airport, I saw everything and followed the grey van!”

“That’s why you disappeared so suddenly.” Jupiter suddenly realized. Had they wronged their driver?

“Do you think I’m going off without getting my money?” Ali added disarmingly.

Bob smiled. He believed the man and nodded at Jupiter to reassure him.

“Sorry about that, Ali.” The First Investigator’s face also relaxed as the two of them helped Ali get up.

Jupe approached the tomb and put his hands on the edge of the stone slab cover. The cover was so heavy that it took the three of them to move it. When the opening was finally big enough, Jupiter curiously stuck his head inside. He saw two bodies in the semi-darkness. “Pete?”

“And Layla,” it came from below. Pete pulled himself together. “Good that you are here! We just managed to free ourselves from the shackles!”

Together they pushed the slab cover more to the side. Pete helped Layla climb out of the tomb, then followed her. The bright light blinded them and both stood motionless in the sun for a moment.

11. Pete Finds the Solution

The pulsation of the big city sounded muffled all the way into the courtyard, but they could also hear the light wind and a few children's voices coming from the street. Layla immediately sent a text message to her mother to inform her of her rescue.

"I think we better get out of here in case Dalbello comes back," Jupe said. "Layla, do you know somewhere we could go? We need to consolidate our findings and decide what to do next."

"There is a café near here," Layla typed. "We can go in the taxi."

Layla directed Ali to the café. The Three Investigators asked Ali Eddine to wait for them in the car because they had something to discuss with Layla. Before they exchanged news, Layla wrote another message to her mother to tell her where they were. The three boys watched her and kept silent.

A minute later, Layla's mother replied that she was already on her way to meet her.

"It'll take a few more minutes," Layla typed into Talky for The Three Investigators. "In the meantime we can talk. Pete has already told me a lot about your day. How far did you get with the puzzle? You were supposed to wait for me!"

"We wanted to use the time," replied Jupiter. "And we have also made a lot of progress... but please tell us whether you found Rubbish... I mean, George!"

Layla's answer could be read from her face. "I realized that when a tramp is missing in America, nobody cares—not even the police."

"I can imagine that," said Jupiter. "They'd probably listen to you for a minute and then turn back to their coffee cups. Guess you were glad not to get arrested instead."

Layla nodded and smiled. "It was something like that."

"That's what we're here for," Bob said. "The Three Investigators. We deal with mysteries that the police don't bother about. And after what we found out so far, there is really something to this mystery story. Do you suspect that George was one of those searching for the Chamber of Knowledge?"

"Yes. He told me then that he was on the trail of a great secret, and if he finds it, he would cash in on it. Then he would bring us to America."

"Didn't he earn enough from his job at the bank?" Bob asked.

"It was all right. But, of course, it wasn't enough to start a new life."

"Then what happened?" Jupe asked.

"He acted more and more mysteriously. One day he said he was close to the solution. A few days later, he disappeared. It took me a long time to track him down through his few relatives in England. Well, finally I went to Rocky Beach, and you know the rest."

The Three Investigators thought about it.

"What is your mother doing now?" asked Bob, who was always interested in private information.

Layla put Talky on her lap. "She is still working in the bank, and she is with another man, also from the same bank."

In the meantime, Jupiter had paused in his thoughts. He took out the football magazine with the letter. "Our only option is still to solve the puzzle ourselves. Hopefully through this,

we can find George. And at the same time... we might uncover one of the greatest secrets in the history of mankind—the secret of the Sphinx!”

“How did George intend to cash in on the discovery?” Pete asked.

Jupiter could not quite hide the trace of complacency in his gaze. Sometimes, Pete could be wonderfully naïve.

“The Chamber of Knowledge will unveil the secret knowledge which is of great value by itself. In addition, there may even be ancient art treasures there,” Jupe said. “All in all, the discovery of the chamber is an event that can be marketed excellently. I can already see the bestseller list before my eyes—in top position—*How We Solved the Secret of the Sphinx* by Jupiter Jones, Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews.”

“I hope this book will never be published,” Bob replied. “And if it does, we’ll donate the fee to charity.”

“At least part of it,” Pete remarked.

Jupiter nodded. “Of course. We remain true to each other. We don’t intend to use our detective work to become rich... we want success!”

“And you don’t think about me at all?” Layla announced. “You wouldn’t even be here without me!”

Jupiter looked at her. Since the Talky could hardly put any nuances into the accentuation, the only way to recognize what she meant was by her facial expression. She did not seem to be angry.

“Whatever it is, we first have to find the chamber,” said Jupiter, “and before Dalbello... otherwise the book will be published under a completely different name.”

Bob agreed. “But Dalbello has a copy of the letter! And this guy is gonna keep us out of the way.”

Jupiter opened the magazine. “So listen...” he said. The First Investigator read the whole letter again from the beginning. They had not found it too difficult to follow the directions—they had gone the Tomb of the Priest, seen the scarab at the Cairo Museum, and obtained the clue to the Muhammad Ali Mosque, where they had discovered the third word. This third word would lead them to a small and very old shop in the big bazaar, which had to be the famous Khan el-Khalili.

Jupiter asked Bob to switch on the digital camera.

Bob pushed a few buttons. “Yes, here it is. The third word is in Arabic letters. Do you know what they mean?” Bob showed the photo to Layla.

Layla took the camera and a smile flitted across her face. “It means ‘queen’,” she tapped into her Talky.

“Queen... I suppose we must find a shop of this name. I very much hope it still exists. Have you any idea where it is?” Bob asked.

Layla shook her head. “The bazaar is huge.”

“Before that, we have to figure out the secret phrase,” Jupe stated. “According to the letter, it is a meaningful sentence containing all three words.”

“Okay, so we have ‘Sphinx’, ‘Wisdom’, and ‘Queen’.” Bob summarized. “We only have to make a sentence out of it.”

“The queen is the wisdom of the Sphinx,” Pete started right away and everyone started laughing because it didn’t make sense. “No, no, I mean, ‘Wisdom is the queen of...’, ‘the Sphinx is wisdom...’ Oh, nonsense... ‘The queen of wisdom is the Sphinx’!”

“Pete!” Jupiter snorted. “Pete, you are simply unique! But yes! That’s the only way to say it! ‘The queen of wisdom is the Sphinx’!”

“Well, thank you,” Pete said and gave a feignedly offended look. “I have solved the puzzle and you laugh like I just made a stupid joke!”

Jupiter focused on the directions outlining the next stage of the search:

Ask for the agent and cite the secret phrase in Arabic. If you are correct, the agent will bring you to the chamber.

At that moment, they heard footsteps and they looked up. A woman entered the café—a woman with an impressive appearance, and dressed in modern clothes. At first glance, Pete knew where Layla must have got some of her beauty from.

“Layla!” the woman cried.

Layla jumped up and the two fell into each other’s arms. It took quite a while for them to become detached from each other. Only then did the woman’s gaze fall on The Three Investigators, who stood up and stepped embarrassed from one foot to the other. “And you are the boys from Rocky Beach?”

They nodded.

“I should never have let Layla go to America,” said the woman. “I didn’t have a good feeling about it from the beginning.”

“I think the worst is over,” Pete announced to the astonishment of his colleagues, because it was normally Jupiter’s role. “I’m Pete Crenshaw... nice to meet you.”

“Aisha—Layla’s mother.”

Bob introduced himself, then Jupiter.

“We don’t have much time,” Jupe added. “We don’t know where and when Dalbello will show up.”

“Dalbello?” Aisha wondered.

“An American who is also searching for the secret Chamber of Knowledge, as was George,” Jupe explained. “That’s why Dalbello abducted Pete and Layla. Fortunately, we were able to free them both. Together with Layla, we want to solve the mystery of this case and maybe we will get something out of George’s past.”

“Yes, Layla told me,” Aisha said. “She was close to George so she wanted to find out what happened to him, but I don’t anymore. George just left that day. He wanted to get us a lot of money so that we could live in peace, but that failed completely. George just took the money from the bank. It was some kind of dirty business. The money and George suddenly disappeared. Well, fortunately, a colleague of George’s took care of us then.”

Layla typed something into her Talky. “Where’s Dick?”

“Dick? At work, I guess. I couldn’t reach him.” To the questioning looks of The Three Investigators, Aisha added: “Dick Vincent is George’s former colleague. He became my new friend... But now let’s go. We should call the police.”

“I would wait a little longer with that,” replied Jupiter. “I think we have a good chance to solve the case. I’m sure you want to hear what happened.”

The Three Investigators talked her out of calling the police, who would hardly believe their story anyway. Layla’s mother agreed and called Ali, who had been waiting by his taxi the whole time.

Layla used the opportunity to find out more about the small shop they had to look for by sending some texts. It could be anywhere in the Khan el-Khalili, the biggest bazaar in Cairo, with an almost confusing collection of alleys and shops. After the third reply Layla, blinked conspiratorially at The Three Investigators.

Jupiter understood. “We should leave now,” he said. “It’s late and we still have plans.”

Aisha said some Arabic words to the waiter. “It was nice meeting you,” she then said to The Three Investigators. “And thanks for helping Layla!”

Aisha paid for the drinks and The Three Investigators and Layla said goodbye to her. In the meantime, it had become evening.

12. In the Big Bazaar

Darkness had quickly fallen. Ali Eddine fought his way into the right lane and let his Peugeot roll out to a small square behind a couple of waiting taxis.

"Here we are," he said, pointing to a crowded, brightly coloured road. "Go on there and you are in Khan el-Khalili. Should I wait for you?"

Jupiter pulled out his wallet. "Ali," he began, "we don't know exactly what's going to happen in the next few hours. That's why I want to give you your money now."

"Do Americans believe that the curse of the Sphinx will kill you?" Ali asked. The corners of his eyes twitched.

"How do you know about the curse?" Jupiter raised.

"Read in magazine! With the Sphinx, you never know. Better give me money now, yeah!"

Jupiter swallowed. Ali knew more than he thought, and he seemed to believe in the curse of the Sphinx. But Jupiter was sure that this was a pure ghost story to scare off the treasure hunters.

Without trembling the slightest, he counted the sum agreed for the day. "Thank you very much for your help," the First Investigator said and pressed the notes into the driver's hand, "but please wait another hour. We may need you after all, then we'll pay you again."

"Americans can come," said Ali, putting the money in his shirt pocket without looking. "I can wait two hours. Money is enough for that."

With a sinking feeling in their stomachs, the boys and Layla got out and said goodbye to the taxi driver. They hoped they would see him again and waved to him briefly. Then they turned around and left.

After only a few metres, The Three Investigators and the girl were immersed in the hustle and bustle of the bazaar. One shop after the other joined together to form an endless colourful chain of shopping temptations. There was an almost overflowing abundance of model pyramids, statues, souvenirs, all kinds of dazzle, hookahs, clothes, and many small treasures. In addition, the scent of spices mingled in the air with the babble of voices of the merchants, who approached the curious tourists around their shops. The great bazaar of Cairo—it was seeing, it was hearing, it was the smell of another world. With a strange mixture of suspicion and fascination, The Three Investigators wandered through the maze of alleyways and very soon, they lost their orientation.

But Layla knew her way around. She energetically pushed the men who were waiting for the tourists in front of the shops aside and cleared the way for The Three Investigators. She turned into a narrow alley, from which an even narrower one soon branched off, and another. More and more people got lost, only few tourists dared to come here. Pete was glad that there were four of them. Alone, he would not have dared to go so far.

Here and there, a few men stood around in small groups. Occasionally, someone spoke to them, but Layla continued on unperturbed. Pete's eyes fell on the displays of the shops filled with supposedly old antiques. Then Layla's steps became slower.

"It must be here somewhere," she said. They frantically searched shop after shop.

Finally, they almost walked past it. Very delicately carved into the door frame, Bob saw the Arabic characters for 'queen' that he had copied at the mosque. They were at their next destination! Now at last, they would be led to the chamber!

With Pete in front, they squeezed through the narrow passageway that led into the shop. It was also an antique shop. The Three Investigators almost had the impression of having entered a small museum. Towards the back, the shop widened out into a respectable sales room. Next to a full-length mirror, hung two heavy curtains, between which a man stepped out. He said something to them in Arabic. While he was still speaking, Jupiter noticed a movement in the mirror.

"Dalbello!" he exclaimed and turned around... but there was no one there. Jupiter was sure that he had recognized the American right there a few seconds ago.

Excited, he pulled Bob, who was closest to him, by the arm. "Come! We must distract Dalbello! He is on our trail! Pete, you have to go proceed with Layla!" Juve handed Pete the red bag and also put something in his trouser pocket. "This is your insurance, Pete!"

Without a word more, Jupiter and Bob dashed out. Pete needed a moment to recover from the surprise. Layla had turned to the salesman again and typed something into her Talky. It was in Arabic.

The man's face lit up and he looked at his guest. "You American?" he said in broken English.

Pete nodded. "We are looking for a certain place. A very special place!"

Now it came down to the right wording and Pete stressed the syllables so slowly that the man could understand him well. "We are looking for the Chamber of Knowledge. The queen of wisdom is the Sphinx!"

The man did not make a face. Layla typed the sentence in Arabic into her Talky.

There was a slight flicker in the salesman's eyes. "Excuse me?" he asked.

"The queen of wisdom is the Sphinx," Pete repeated excitedly. Was the man slow on the uptake? "Listen! The queen of wisdom is the Sphinx. That is the secret phrase! You must help us!"

"Oh, yes, the chamber... Wait here." The man quickly bowed and disappeared again between the curtains.

While Layla and Pete waited, they exchanged several perplexed looks. There was nothing more to be seen of Jupiter and Bob. Only after a few minutes did the curtains move again and Pete's eyes widened.

A woman came out, fully dressed in a black cape with a headgear that left nothing but her eyes free. Even on her hands, she wore fine black gloves. Pete knew that many Islamic women wore veils in the public, so it was normal here.

The pair of eyes looked at Pete so sharply that he stuttered: "Wisdom... the queen of wisdom is the Sphinx—we are looking for the Chamber of Knowledge!"

The woman's eyes seemed to test Pete. Then she slowly turned around, stepped between the curtains and gave a hand signal that they should follow her.

"Where is Juve and Bob?" Pete cried and turned around desperately. He could not believe it. Why had the agent who was supposed to take them to the Chamber of Knowledge appeared so quickly? She couldn't have waited years for this moment behind the curtain!

Wordlessly, the woman waved to them again. In response, Layla pushed Pete through the opening. Almost glad that the decision had been taken away from him, Pete stumbled forward. He felt that Layla wanted to solve the puzzle now.

They walked through a kind of office that was filled with all kinds of boxes. The woman went ahead and gave Pete and Layla a sign to follow her. They followed and suddenly found

themselves in a narrow, dark courtyard where a van was parked. The woman opened the back door of the van and made a gesture for them to get in.

“Layla,” mumbled Pete. “I don’t know. We might be trapped in there. The van has no windows. It all seems so strange! And Jupiter and Bob aren’t here...”

Layla looked at him perplexed.

“... On the other hand, now we are on the verge of this,” Pete continued. “If we hesitate, who knows? I’m sure they only use this van so that we can’t see where we are going—a kind of security, but... Layla, to be honest, I feel quite spooked, not to say, I’m scared!”

The Arab woman repeated her gesture, this time, more impatiently.

“All right!” said Pete. His hand went into his trouser pocket and felt the small button that Jupiter had given him.

Determined, he took the few steps towards the van. Just before reaching the door, he stumbled. He hoped it looked unintentional. With his hand, he supported himself against the body of the van. Even if it was only a moment, there was enough time to fix the small tracking device on the underside of the vehicle.

Then Pete got into the van. Layla followed him. In the next moment, the woman threw the door shut and locked it. It was so dark inside that they couldn’t even see their hand in front of their eyes. Nervously, Pete sat next to Layla, who calmly put her arm on his shoulder. Now they could only hope that everything went well!

The van started to move off.

13. The Chamber of Knowledge

They were on the road for a long time. In the beginning, the journey went through the city. Pete could tell by the noises from the outside. Then it became quieter and the van didn't stop as often. Apparently they had left Cairo. They made several turns and fewer and fewer other vehicles could be heard.

At some point, Pete suspected that they must have reached a lonely area, probably the desert. The rocking of the drive had long since made him sick. Suddenly the van stopped. The driver's door opened and Pete tensed his muscles. Now it was time to pay attention. A strange noise came in from outside.

"It sounds like a steel gate," Pete thought to himself. "I know that. It's like at The Jones Salvage Yard. How I'd love to be there now..."

The driver got back into the van, closed the door, and moved the van a few metres ahead. The engine was turned off. The woman got out, her footsteps echoed, and again this strange noise came in from the outside.

"We are in a garage," Pete said and crawled to the back door. He heard the key turning in the lock, and then the van door was opened.

A glistening beam of light hit Pete right in the middle of his face and he closed his eyes blinded. The woman tugged at Pete's arm. Trembling, he got out and reached out his hand to Layla, who followed him. The beam of light left them and wandered along the wall.

Pete had guessed correctly—they were in some kind of garage. It seemed to have been hewn into a rock. There was a ventilation shaft at the top and a few metres further on stood an inconspicuous stone slab which the woman walked towards with sluggish steps.

For a few seconds, her hand moved along the edge of the slab, then she had found what she was looking for. With a screeching sound, the slab slid to the side and revealed a passageway. The woman stepped aside and motioned to them to enter.

"Should we go in there?" Pete asked. His voice vibrated. The woman looked at him for a moment, then she stepped in front of the slab and activated the mechanism to close the stone door.

"Stop!" cried Pete. "That was not what I meant."

Layla quickly typed a few Arabic words into her Talky.

Then the woman nodded and opened the stone door again. Pete pulled out a small flashlight. With renewed courage, he squeezed himself through the opening. Layla followed him.

When both were in the passageway, the stone door closed behind them. The screeching noise sounded so frightening that it seemed to shake every bone in their bodies. But it was too late to think whether they had fallen into a trap.

Pete carefully groped his way forward. The passageway became a little wider, but Pete had to duck to avoid hitting his head against the ceiling. After a while, the passageway curved. A musty smell struck them. Step by step, Pete moved forward with the beam of the flashlight in front of him. Suddenly he stopped.

There it was! They were finally here! In front of them was a small chamber with a roughly rectangular base. The light beam hit one of the longitudinal walls, which was

decorated with mysterious paintings and hieroglyphic characters. On the opposite narrow wall, Pete saw a platform. A stone Sphinx statue was enthroned on it at about head height!

Pete entered the chamber and lit it directly. The statue had the head of a lion and the face of a human—just like the Great Sphinx of Giza, only that her nose was not broken off and her mouth was opened. The eyes were two black holes. She seemed to fixate the observer.

“Eerie, isn’t it?” Pete whispered and his hand searched for Layla’s. “Fortunately, the eyes did not sparkle red, otherwise we would be in trouble. ‘The red glow of the eyes herald death’—that is what the letter says, but she obviously likes us.” Pete forced a laugh. “We are close to solving a great mystery of mankind!”

Layla returned the grip and pulled out her Talky. “But Sir Leonard Dempsey tried this before us,” she typed. “Why hasn’t anyone heard from him since? Or George?”

Suddenly they both flinched. The beam of light from Pete’s flashlight shone on a skeleton on the ground. Unwillingly, Pete took a step back.

“These... these... these are the bones of a human,” he stuttered.

Now Layla’s fingers literally flew over her device. “Shall we get out of here instead?” it came from Talky.

“No.” Pete took courage and bent over the bones. “I wonder how long he’s been lying here... Perhaps these are the remains of Sir Leonard Dempsey, the author of the letter! He had seen the eyes of the Sphinx and had to die! ... Look! He’s still holding something in his hand!”

The finger bones of the dead man clasped something like a brown-coloured crystal that was roughly in the shape of a pyramid. Before Layla could hold him back, Pete pressed his flashlight into her hand and reached for the strange crystal. He picked up the bone hand and looked at the crystal closely.

“This little crystal pyramid must have something to do with the puzzle,” Pete said excitedly and tried to remove the crystal, but somehow it was stuck. Disgusted, Pete let go of the bone hand. “What’s happened to Jupe and Bob? They should have been with us by now!”

Layla typed on her Talky: “How?”

“Jupe slipped me a tracking transmitter which I stuck under the van. They should be able to follow us.”

Layla nodded appreciatively. Then she tapped into her Talky. “Does Jupiter have your mobile phone?”

“Yes.”

Layla tried to call the mobile phone.

“Any connection?” Pete asked.

She shook her head and kept her Talky.

“Then we’ll take care of the puzzle ourselves,” said Pete. “Let’s not waste time.”

He felt a strange tingling sensation on his back. All the time, unlike Jupiter, he had been quite indifferent to the treasure. He wanted to help Layla and get behind the secret of Rubbish-George. Now they were very close to the solution of the puzzle. Suddenly he felt the seductive power of wealth. Would Layla and he uncover, in a few moments, a secret that so many people were after? Something for which at least one person had to give his life to? And what would he do with the treasure? Hand it over to the Egyptian authorities? Or pack it into a suitcase and head to the South Seas with Layla?

“What’s wrong with you?” asked Layla. “Are you thinking about the treasure? And what we’ll do with everything once we get to it?”

Pete grinned. She knew exactly what was going on inside him. The answer was clear. He was Pete—Pete Crenshaw.

“We’re setting off for the South Seas,” he said.

Layla looked at him in astonishment.

He smiled gently. “No, of course not. The Egyptian authorities get everything! Some kind of finder’s fee will be paid for us, and that should be enough for three weeks’ holiday, for all of us!—Let’s take another look at the letter.”

Pete pulled the magazine out of the red bag. They sat down on the sandy ground and turned the pages over. Although they had read the passage a thousand times before, they went through the final step again in detail:

Once in the chamber, beware of the Sphinx. Do not provoke her. The red glow of the eyes herald death! And the deadly breath will destroy you!

The Sphinx’s question to you is this: ‘Tell me, where lies the key to the truth?’

Answer the Sphinx’s question—but be silent... If you are wrong, the red eyes of death will shine. If you are right, the gate to knowledge will open.

“So finally, it comes down to this riddle.” Pete looked up at the stone statue that sat silently in front of them. As ridiculous as this riddle might have sounded in daylight, but here, in the gloomy, musty chamber and next to the skeleton, Pete was no longer so sure that ancient curses could not come true in mysterious Egypt.

“So, where lies the key to the truth?” Pete asked, closed the magazine and tucked it under his T-shirt.

Layla pondered for a moment. “In wisdom,” she typed away. “In philosophy... in faith... in knowledge... in the world... in nothingness... in life... in ourselves... or... in silence?” She looked up.

“You already sound like Jupiter,” Pete said. “None of this helps! The riddle says that we should answer the question but be silent. How do you do that? I feel like an idiot! As if she could hear us! Can someone explain this to me?”

Layla grinned. “Why not stand in front of the Sphinx and keep quiet?”

“Really?”

Layla nodded.

“What if something goes wrong?”

“Should I do it? I’m mute!”

Before Pete could answer, Layla had got up and stood in front of the Sphinx. She looked into the statue’s eyes... and remained silent.

With a mixture of amazement, curiosity and fear, Pete watched her for a while. When nothing happened, his tension slowly eased.

“You can stop,” he said. “The silence won’t get us anywhere.”

Layla agreed and sat down with him again. “I don’t know. Ancient Egyptian riddles are terrible!”

“Too bad Jupiter is not here,” said Pete. “I’m sure he would have an idea. He stares around, pinches his lower lip and... poof! The solution comes out from his lips!”

Layla looked at him. “Not from the lips, but from the tongue,” she typed. “Pete, that’s it! There is an Arabic proverb that says: ‘The tongue of experience utters the most truth.’ It’s the tongue!”

Pete shook his head. “But the riddle says ‘be silent’!”

“Then we’ll just have to keep thinking,” Layla typed. “There are so many paintings and carvings on the wall. There must be a clue somewhere! Let’s have a look at the murals. We haven’t paid enough attention to them yet.”

Since he had no better idea, Pete agreed.

Step by step, they walked along the walls and lit up the paintings—figures, animals, which certainly meant a lot to ancient Egyptians, but not much to the two of them.

“I’m afraid this is what real Egyptologists work on,” muttered Pete resignedly.

Nevertheless, they wanted to have a good look at everything at least once. When they had reached the wall opposite the Sphinx, Pete pushed Layla to the side in surprise. “There is a carving of the Sphinx here!”

Pete stepped closer to the wall. The carving was about fifty centimetres high and placed at chest height. Suddenly he discovered something strange. His hand went over the surface of the wall and caught a small indentation.

“The Sphinx’s mouth here is also open! But there is something missing. There is a small, elaborate hole in the mouth...” He felt the opening with his finger, waiting for some mechanism to trigger. He saw Layla tapping her Talky again.

“The crystal!” she asked. “The little pyramid that the Bone Man holds in his hand!”

Suddenly all thoughts joined together like jigsaw pieces to form a picture.

“Of course!” exclaimed Pete excitedly. “The crystal! It should fit in here!”

14. Eyes of Death

The little crystal pyramid that the Bone Man held in his hand had to be the solution to everything.

"The riddle says: 'Tell me, where lies the key to the truth?'" Pete said.

"The key to the truth lies on the tongue," Layla typed excitedly. "The little pyramid represents the truth. It must be placed where the indentation is, on the tongue of the Sphinx."

"But what is meant by answering the question but be silent?" Pete wondered.

"You give the answer by putting the crystal on the tongue," Layla replied. "You need not be saying anything, hence you are silent!"

"That's sounds reasonable," Pete agreed. He turned around and knelt down next to the skeleton. Between the phalanges, the crystal shone in the light from the flashlight. Layla positioned the beam so that Pete could see better.

Much more carefully than before, Pete bent the bones apart. It cracked uncomfortably and Pete flinched. But then the crystal slipped out of its clasp and fell onto the ground. Layla shone the light on it. Not only its shape reminded her of the great pyramids, but also its light brownish colour matched the great historical structures.

With trembling hands, Pete picked up the crystal and was fascinated as he turned it between his fingers.

"Look," he suddenly said. "A figure is carved onto one of the triangular surfaces... a woman..." Pete murmured. "What is she holding in her hand? Twigs?"

Layla shook her head and typed. "It is Seshat—an ancient Egyptian goddess. The branches are her writing tools. Seshat is the goddess of wisdom, knowledge and writing. Pete, it fits perfectly—she was a scribe and record keeper!"

"A record keeper of esoteric knowledge—the knowledge that reveals the truth!" Pete's breath was faster. "We're on the right track!"

"Yes! And that is represented by the crystal, and it has to be placed on the tongue!" Layla typed excitedly.

Pete felt a tingling sensation all over his body. "We got it! And that without Jupiter! We just have to take the crystal and fit it into the recess of the wall carving! That should uncover a thousand-year-old secret!"

He was ecstatic that they had come to this stage of the riddle, but slowly other thoughts began to enter his brain and brought forward fear. "But if Sir Leonard Dempsey found the crystal, why is he lying here in the chamber as a corpse?"

"If it is Dempsey at all," Layla typed. "It can't have been that long since he was in this chamber. The bones here seem older to me."

"I don't know anything about corpses," said Pete. "I don't want to know all that much about it either. I find it scary enough as it is. And besides, it doesn't matter who died here. Whoever found the crystal still didn't survive!"

"Or he was killed by a companion," Layla typed. "Greed!"

"Then why didn't the companion get to the treasure?" Pete asked doubtfully.

"You're right," Layla typed. "Perhaps this explorer was alone, and he just had a heart attack from the excitement before he could do anything else."

“Hmm...” The explanation wasn’t so far-fetched. Pete felt his heart beating. How big the excitement had to be when people had spent a lifetime on the trail of the treasure? But could one really be sure?

Doubtfully, he looked at the small crystal. “Does it matter how you put it into the hole?” he said. “Don’t forget the warning—if we lay it wrongly, the red eyes of death will shine; if we lay it right, the gate to knowledge will open... Perhaps the carving of the goddess must be placed exactly at a certain position.”

Layla nodded thoughtfully. “That sounds reasonable. I guess the base of the pyramid rests on the tongue of the Sphinx and the carving facing out.”

“Hmm...” Pete went. “Shall we try?”

Layla nodded.

Pete got up and stood in front of the carving of the Sphinx on the wall. Carefully he turned the crystal in his hands. “Like this?” he asked.

Layla nodded. “Should I try?”

For a moment, Pete was tempted to accept Layla’s offer, but he could not do so. He had to overcome his fear. Too bad that Jupe was not there. He would have done the job.

But actually everything was logical—the riddle, the tongue, the goddess who was also the keeper of knowledge... Pete felt out the recess. It had to be like Layla had said.

“Do you think George was standing here before?” Pete asked. “Maybe he didn’t dare to put the crystal in... and couldn’t live with defeat and ran away!”

Layla shrugged her shoulders.

“All right,” said Pete. “We do not know. Now it is about us. I’ll do it!” A warning shot through his head: ‘If you are wrong, the red eyes of death will shine.’

Pete looked into the eyes of the Sphinx on the wall. How should they be able to shine? With trembling hands, he held the crystal up to the opening. He swallowed. With his eyes firmly fixed on the eyes of the Sphinx, he slowly placed the pyramid crystal inside.

It fitted exactly.

He breathed out.

The eyes did not turn red.

For a few seconds, Pete and Layla remained frozen, paying attention to every little noise... but all they heard was their heavy breathing. No mechanism was triggered to show them the way to happiness... or disaster. There was a ghostly silence.

“Perhaps it wasn’t correct,” Pete said after a while in a combination of disappointment and also relief that nothing had happened to them. “... Or the mechanism is not working.”

Layla looked at him, perplexed.

“There’s something we’ve overlooked,” Pete pondered. “Was our assumption really logical? The Bone Man has the crystal and wants to put it into the recess on the wall. But how did he even find the little pyramid?”

“Must be somewhere here,” Layla typed.

“Layla! I think we’ve got it wrong!” exclaimed Pete excitedly. “This little pyramid is not to be put in the wall but in the statue over there! I think it must have originally been hidden in the wall. The explorer had taken it out and was going to put it in the Sphinx statue!”

Layla turned around and lit up the statue. This lion’s mouth was open. It seemed to laugh at both of them.

“We have to put the pyramid in the mouth of the Sphinx statue,” Pete said. He stepped closer to the statue. The eyes were black holes and the mouth was a dark maw. The statue instilled much more fear in him than the carving on the wall.

“Hand me the flashlight,” said Pete. “Now of all times, the light is fading...”

Layla handed him the flashlight and Pete shone into the mouth opening. After a few centimetres it curved downwards, so he couldn't see further in.

"Damn! The batteries are running out!" Pete gave Layla the flashlight back. It glowed for a moment, then it went out completely. They stood in darkness.

"Wait!" it came from Talky.

Layla had pulled out her Talky and switched on the display. A faint greenish light fell on her face. She turned Talky so that the face of the Sphinx was illuminated. In the shaky glow, the Sphinx looked even more oppressive than earlier.

Pete carefully put his hand into the mouth opening. He felt his neck hairs stand up in fear as if the mouth could snap shut at any moment. Above all, he did not know what to expect. Anything could be in this opening—spiders, rats, a poisonous snake...

The inside of the mouth felt smooth and cold. Pete had to stand on tiptoe to reach deeper into it. Soon half of his forearm had disappeared into the Sphinx.

Suddenly something crawled over his forearm. His body was petrified. He felt many small feet moving over the back of his hand. Pete swallowed and waited for the fatal stab. But whatever crawled there—it ran along his index finger and disappeared.

Pete breathed out and dared to move again. Exasperated, he wanted to pull his arm out of the opening when he felt something.

"There's a square hole! For the pyramid!" As if relieved, he took his arm out. "Layla, hand me the little pyramid!"

Layla ran to the opposite wall, removed the small pyramid from the recess in the wall and handed it to Pete.

Pete turned the crystal into the right position. Then he gathered all his courage, hoping that the crawling animal had in the meantime left. He looked the Sphinx in the eyes and reached into the mouth opening for the second time. Carefully he groped his way forward, then he had found the spot. Slowly he put the pyramid into the opening. It fitted exactly.

Something clicked.

The two of them did not dare to breathe.

For a few seconds, nothing happened. Then Layla and Pete panicked. At first, it was only a slight glow, but it quickly became more intense. The eyes of the Sphinx glowed! They glowed red! They had awakened the curse of the Sphinx!

A hissing sound became audible and a cold mist was blowing out from the mouth of the lion. It felt like the breath of death. Pete gasped in horror as he and Layla lost their senses.

"The curse of the Sphinx," muttered Pete. "Layla... I am dying... Jupe... Bob..." Then he collapsed.

As they fell, they embraced each other. They didn't even feel themselves sinking to the ground.

15. Track into the Desert

When Jupiter and Bob left Pete and Layla in the small antique shop and ran outside to pursue Dalbello, Jupiter was surprised by the feeling that it was the right decision to take care of the American. He just did not know why yet.

The pieces of the puzzles he had received so far from this case and its circumstances were simply too few to set his relentless logic in motion. Certainly, some questions provoked him to think further, in particular—How had Dalbello known which hotel they were staying at in order to steal the copy of the letter? Why had he suddenly run away from them now?

The best thing to do was to grab the guy and confront him! In this crowded bazaar, the American would not dare to pull out his gun and threaten them. This shot through Jupiter's mind almost simultaneously while he frantically searched the surroundings.

It almost escaped his notice how Dalbello slipped into a small shop that was about twenty metres away. "Go, Bob! There he is!"

They rudely pushed aside an alley vendor who wanted to approach them and sprinted to the front of the shop. Bob ripped open the door and Jupiter rushed in. There was only the salesman in the shop who was cleaning a metal clock, and he looked up at them silently. No one else was there.

"Is there an American here?" cried Jupiter. The man shrugged his shoulders and his mouth moved slightly.

"Through the back," Jupiter cried and squeezed himself slalom-like and astonishingly agile through a whole collection of hookahs. Bob followed him.

Only when they reached the very end of the shop did Jupiter realize that he had made a mistake. Next to the entrance was a display stand with earrings. He had focussed too much on the back exit and ignored the display. Now a shadow slid out from behind it—it was Dalbello... and in a few steps, the American was outside.

Bob and Jupiter rushed back the way they came in. They had to be careful not to damage any of the glass hookahs. When they reached the alley, they saw the American walking along a row of shops a long way away.

"We'll get him," Jupiter cried and ran. But several corners and a few alleys further on, there was no trace of Dalbello. "Damn!" he shouted, annoyed. "I'd love to catch him!"

Bob looked at his friend in surprise. "I thought we were just trying to distract him from Pete."

"Maybe it is best that we get back to Pete and Layla!" Jupe decided. "Dalbello, in any case, is long gone. We may not have caught him, but at least we chased him away."

But Jupiter and Bob took a while to find their way around the maze of alleys. By the time, they reached the small shop, Layla and Pete had long since left. Only the salesman was still there.

When Jupiter asked about Pete, the salesman suddenly didn't understand a word of English and acted as if he didn't know anything.

"It's no use, Jupe," Bob said and pulled his friend back outside. "We're not going to get anything out of him! What are we going to do now?"

Jupiter's agitated expression gave way to a broad grin. "The insurance!"

“Insurance?” A question mark appeared on Bob’s forehead.

“Yes! The insurance! Pete has our tracking transmitter with him, and if he has been clever and placed it correctly, we can now follow him!”

“So let go find Ali!” Bob cried.

They were lucky. The taxi driver was still waiting at the same place where he let them off earlier.

When he spotted Jupiter and Bob, a beam went over his face. “Oh, my American friends! But where are the others?”

“We have to go after Pete and Layla!” Jupiter pranced. He was simply not used to running around.

The driver opened the door for them and Jupiter let himself plop into the car exhausted.

“Did they run away with a treasure map,” Ali asked as he sat behind the wheel. “I thought you were friends!”

“They did not run away. They are being taken by someone to the mysterious Sphinx!”

Ali was silent.

Bob had an inkling of what was going on inside him. “Don’t worry, Ali. You do not need to accompany us to the deadly Sphinx! We’ll go there alone.”

“Fine. I’ll drive. But where to?”

In the meantime, Jupiter took out a small device. They had been using it for years and it had served them very well. It was the receiver which was set to the frequency of the tracking transmitter that Pete had stuck on the van.

“Hopefully Pete and Layla are not out of reach yet,” Bob said.

In the course of time, Jupiter had succeeded in expanding the device’s range of operations through all kinds of tinkering, but if the distance was too great, even the latest version would have reached its limits.

The First Investigator switched the device on and a flashing dot appeared on the display. “There’s Pete!” exclaimed Jupiter with relief. “They’re just barely in the transmission range! Ali, we have to get there! Diagonally to the left!”

“Where to?” Ali took a questioning look in the rear-view mirror.

“I’ll just tell you the direction! And you know the streets of Cairo!” Jupiter pointed his finger out the window. “Just there! Quickly!”

“Ah. Americans just wanna go there.” Ali stepped on the accelerator, jostled for the main road and turned left at the next opportunity.

“Well done, Ali!” cried Jupiter. “We are just within reach! Can you go any faster?”

“Ah. Americans want faster.” Ali drove like nobody’s business, but it was hard to get closer to the blinking dot.

“I am going out of Cairo,” said the driver. “I think I know where they are going.”

He changed to a main road and after a few minutes, they came to a big intersection which was already on the outskirts of Cairo. Ali stopped and looked questioningly in the rear-view mirror. Jupiter checked the position of the flashing light that was blinking at the very edge of the display.

“That way!”

“Ah. I understand Americans want small oasis!” Ali drove into a narrow road that pointed directly into the desert. Slowly the distance to the flashing dot shortened. But it didn’t take long when suddenly the light disappeared from the display.

“No!” exclaimed Jupiter in horror. “The tracking device has disappeared! I hope it has not been discovered! Or that Pete has gone into a building that absorbs the signals.”

“Absorbed?” Bob asked. “You mean the signal is blocked? Too much rock? Steel?”

Jupiter nodded, but his brain was frantically working. He was mentally calculating the distance they still had to cover to get to the place where the tracking device had gone out. According to Ali's estimate of the distance to the oasis, Pete and Layla could not have reached there yet.

Ali continued on, and the deeper they went into the desert, the more nervous Jupiter became. When he could no longer stand it, he asked the driver to slow down. Jupe looked out the right window and Bob the left, and they searched the roadside for junctions and buildings. Luckily the moonlight was bright, but apart from endless yellow sand, there was nothing. They had not seen another vehicle for many minutes.

Suddenly Bob asked Ali to stop.

Ali stopped and turned his head back. "What is it?"

"Americans want to go back," Bob said dryly. "I saw something a while ago."

Ali grinned and turned the car around.

"Stop!" Bob suddenly said and bent over to Jupiter. "Do you see it?"

Jupiter saw it immediately. "Well observed, Bob! There are tyre marks running across the side!"

They got out. The moonlight was bright enough that they could see the tracks a few metres away. They led between two boulders, right into the middle of the desert. The two investigators discovered that there was a small driveway. Ali examined the sandy path sceptically. "I don't think I should drive there."

"Yes, I think we'll try to go on foot," Jupiter placated. "Ali, do you have a flashlight you can lend us?"

Ali opened the boot of his taxi and rummaged around for a while. Then he took out a hand lamp.

"Best service from Ali Eddine," he said proudly. "Americans can go find friends. I'll wait here in the car."

Jupiter took the lamp and together with Bob he started stomping. Two minutes later, the two had disappeared behind the sand mountains.

16. Out of Action

Jupiter and Bob had only gone for a few minutes. It was tiring to walk through the sand. They were alone and they already couldn't see Ali Eddine or his car. Instead, they heard the wind and above them, the desert night stretched out like a cold arc of light.

Jupe and Bob almost missed their target. Twenty metres further down the hill was a boulder where, on closer look, they found a steel door embedded in it. Desert sand had been sprayed onto the door as a camouflage, but the smooth surface had betrayed the human hand that had built it. There was no question that behind the door was something that not everyone should discover.

Jupiter and Bob examined the door, but they found no way to open it.

"I guess the vehicle that Pete and Layla were in is parked behind this," muttered Jupiter. "That's why we lost the tracking device so suddenly. How long ago was that?"

"Half an hour? More?" Bob looked around. "Let's climb up the boulder to check. Maybe there's some kind of ventilation duct or something."

Since Jupiter had no better proposal, he agreed. They switched off the lamp because the moonlight was enough for them to find an ascent. They climbed around the boulder for quite a while without a plan and with every minute, the feeling of the hopelessness of their undertaking grew in them. As Bob tried to climb up to a small plateau, he bumped his feet against something and there was a strange scratching sound. It was not stone. Immediately Bob called out: "Jupe!"

Jupiter climbed up to him and shone on the spot. A fine grille was embedded in the rock, as if to protect something from dirt and sand. It was not difficult to bend the grille to the side. Behind it was a narrow tunnel, perhaps a ventilation shaft.

Bob looked at Jupiter. "I would rather go down and knock on the door. Why don't we do that? Pete has secured the right to enter the chamber and we are his friends. Surely we can just go in there?"

"No." Jupiter took a deep breath and tightened his shirt. It got cold in the desert when night came. "I am still very suspicious of this whole story," he said. "I am still very puzzled as to how Dalbello knew which hotel we were staying at?"

"Who knew where we were staying at?" Bob wondered.

"We could have told someone," said Jupiter. "And the more I think about it, the stranger this game becomes."

"Are you thinking about Ali?" Bob asked. "I don't think so. Ali is on our side."

"I think I have to put my suspicions aside first and find our way into this place," said Jupiter. "Bob, push yourself in..."

"How?"

"Well, I don't fit in! I am too... stout! You can crawl in the tunnel, Bob."

Bob felt his mouth dry. Who knew what was waiting for him in there. And if he got stuck, how would he get out backwards?

"When you're inside, try to open the door so that I can also get inside," said Jupiter. "We have no other choice."

Bob nodded mechanically. It had to be done. He knelt down, bent the grille to the side and pushed the hand lamp into the opening. Then he crawled in.

It was really tight, and it went steeply down. Bob was about to have a claustrophobia attack. Luckily the tunnel soon got wider. Finally it ended at a metal plate. This was strange for an ancient installation! The plate could easily be pushed to the side and he saw that behind it was a passageway that ran to the left and right. Bob then realized that the tunnel he just crawled through was indeed a ventilation shaft.

Carefully, Bob let himself slide into the passageway and pushed the plate closed again. A draft could have come in and easily given him away. He paused. Very soft voices came to him from the right side of the passageway. It was probably better to turn off the light.

Step by step, Bob groped his way forward. The voices became louder. It was Arabic, with some occasional words of English. Was that Dalbello? How on earth did he get here? The other voice sounded familiar, too, but at that moment, Bob just couldn't figure out who it was. It all sounded too muffled.

Bob's worries grew. Had Pete and Layla been surprised by the American treasure hunter? And what was this strange place? Was it really the Chamber of Knowledge?

Suddenly the passageway ended. A strange construction followed, something like a hatch that one could crawl into and which ended in a narrow tube-like hole bent upwards. Bob tried to see through it, but the curvature was too tight. However, he could insert his hand into the hole a short way in. The voices were now directly in front of him. There he bumped his knees against a light object that rolled away quietly.

In order to grab the object, Bob felt it was all right to switch on the lamp without alerting the people in front. In astonishment, he turned the object in his hand. It was an oversized black spray can with the words 'poison' and a skull symbol printed on it. There were no indication what it was. In any case, the spray can was undoubtedly something from the century he lived in. He was clear that he was not the first person to enter this passageway in thousands of years.

His nervousness increased. Bob stood up and lit up the wall. In two places, a few wires ran out of the stone. Bob traced their path and discovered that they led to a battery in a makeshift compartment. Things got stranger and stranger. Was it a bomb? Or an alarm system?

When he turned around, he startled. Partially hidden on the side of the wall was a little window. He looked through it and saw a dimly lit room with paintings and carvings on the wall—but it was as if he was watching from a higher position that gave a wider perspective. Bob figured that it had to be a periscope construction with mirrors through which one could observe what was happening in the room. In front of a Sphinx statue stood Dalbello and beside him a woman veiled in black. Now they were silent and bending over something.

Suddenly Bob realized that he had to be inside the Sphinx statue! Bob looked more closely at the mirrored image and his breath faltered. The two bundles to which Dalbello and the veiled woman bent down were Pete and Layla!

The two lay lifeless on the ground, tightly embraced as if they were lovers. Were they dead? A sting went through Bob's heart that was more painful than a thousand needles. Bob had to pull himself together so as not to lose his senses. He saw Dalbello turn Pete roughly to the side so that he rolled onto his back.

"Now where's the letter?" he heard Dalbello say. A few minutes later, the American triumphantly pulled out the football magazine from under Pete's T-shirt. "There it is at last! Okay, let's get them into the car!"

Suddenly Bob froze! A third voice cut across the room sharply: “Mr Dalbello! What have you done with Pete and Layla?”

Bob flinched and his heart took a leap. That was Jupe! But as hard as he tried, he could not see the First Investigator in the mirror.

“How did you get in here?” Dalbello yelled.

“It doesn’t matter now,” explained Jupiter. “But I can tell you—this installation has several ventilation shafts!”

“You climbed in through that? Where is one more of you? That Bob? Is he here too?”

Jupiter faltered for a tiny moment. “He is waiting outside,” he lied.

“So you know where we are,” Dalbello said and that sounded like a threat.

“Yes,” said Jupiter. “This place is on its way to a remote oasis. I suppose you lock your victims in a closed van so that they don’t know where they are going.”

“What are you talking about?” Dalbello snapped.

Jupiter ignored the question. “What did you do to Pete and Layla?”

Dalbello laughed scornfully. “They were too curious. So I put them out of action! And I’ll have you now! And then I’ll get Bob.”

Suddenly Dalbello pulled out a gun with his hand. And all of a sudden, Bob was clear—the black aerosol can with the poisonous symbol; Pete and Layla right under the Sphinx; and the riddle that said: ‘the red eyes of death will shine’. The batteries and the wires made the lamps glow!

“If you killed those two, then...” Jupiter’s words failed him.

“You’re next!” hissed Dalbello.

Suddenly the veiled woman interfered in Arabic, but it was not a female voice. It was a man speaking. And this time, Bob knew who it was!

Jupiter apparently did too. “Good day, Mr Abaza! You are under the veil, aren’t you? I recognize you clearly by your voice. Of course, you could use a curator from the museum if you want to put fanatical treasure hunters on the wrong track! There never was a Sir Leonard Dempsey, was it? At least he never wrote the letter! You two invented everything very cleverly to lure your victims into the trap!

“But then we, The Three Investigators, appeared with George Cooper’s letter in our hands to clear up the story. This became dangerous for you! You threatened us—not to take money from us, but to stop us from getting the evidence—and revealing the hoax behind the puzzle. Mr Abaza, you cleverly got information out of us during our visit to the museum. You knew which hotel we were staying at, so your accomplice could steal the copy of the letter!”

Horried, Bob saw Dalbello pull up his gun and aim forward. Bob did not need long to think—the black spray can! He reached into the opening with his arm and pushed the can as far as he could through the Sphinx’s throat. Then he held his breath and pressed the valve. It hissed. He could only hope that Jupe realized what that hiss was and get out.

Bob heard a few mutilated words, then bodies dropped to the ground. Then he crawled back and looked in the mirror.

Abaza and Dalbello lay on the ground, lifeless.

17. Busted!

Bob was clear—under no circumstances was he to inhale any of the spray!

“Jupe!” he shouted, hoping that his friend could hear him. “Get out! This is a poisonous spray!”

So that was what the ventilation shaft were for. Dalbello and Abaza from the museum lured people in front of the Sphinx and killed them. Apparently it was all an elaborate scam. But why? Did Jupiter know?

Bob hurried back up the passageway. When he reached the ventilation shaft, he opened it. He immediately felt the draft that would clean the air. He decided not to crawl back up the shaft but go to the other end of the passageway to see if there was another way out.

There was! He reached a narrow door and opened it. He looked out and saw that he was in a garage. The grey van was there! And a second van as well... and Jupiter just ran in from behind a stone wall! Relieved, Bob ran up to Jupe and quickly told him what he had discovered. Jupiter was amazed.

“And how did you get in here?” Bob wanted to know.

“Another ventilation shaft!” replied Jupiter. “I could open it. Bob, the gas should have cleared by now. We urgently need to check on Pete and Layla!”

Since Jupiter knew the way, he ran ahead. When they entered the room with the Sphinx a few seconds later, their first glance was directed at their two friends. And it took a load off their minds!

Pete and Layla were just getting up. The spray had only stunned them! Astonished, Pete moved like in slow motion—as if he came from another star and had to find his way around the earth first.

He looked around and saw Dalbello and Abaza, who lay there lifeless. Only then did he see his two friends.

“We are alive,” Pete said at the sight of Jupiter, who had joy written all over his face, and his voice sounded almost astonished. Layla sat there and looked at him with glassy eyes. Her lips moved without sound. Pete took her in his arms.

“Jupiter and Bob have come. Everything will be all right,” he said.

Suddenly, Layla gasped when she saw the two men lying there. Abaza was still in the black garb, but Layla was pointing at Dalbello and letting out some noises that none of the others could interpret.

“What’s wrong, Layla?” Bob said. “That’s Dalbello—the American who tried to abduct us earlier.” He then found Talky on the ground and handed it to Layla.

With trembling hands, Layla began to type: “That’s Dick Vincent! My mother’s friend!”

“My gosh!” Jupe exclaimed. “Now that explains everything. Quick, I think we’d better get out of here before they wake up.”

Bob and Jupiter helped Pete and Layla get back on their feet. Jupe also grabbed Dalbello’s gun.

Then they left the chamber, not without taking a last look at the Sphinx statue, whose eyes still sparkled red... but now they were no longer afraid of her.

As they entered the garage, they heard someone banging on the steel door, underpinned by some sharp-sounding Arabic words.

Jupiter looked for the mechanism that would open the door. It didn't take him long before he found the switch. When the door was barely half a metre open, a man in plain clothes rushed in, followed by several policemen with their guns at the ready.

The Egyptian with the gun, who was apparently the leader of the policemen, looked around fleetingly and then shouted in English: "Where are the men?"

Jupiter took the floor. "Take it easy. I will present everything to you."

Then Ali Eddine entered, much more relaxed.

"Ali!" Bob cried. "How... What has happened?"

"My American friends!" Ali said. "I called the Commissioner. For months, he has been searching the men who attacked treasure hunters. I saw you were following them."

The Egyptian policeman nodded. "Yes, Ali called us. I am the Commissioner of the Cairo Police."

"I believe we can bring your investigation to a definitive conclusion," said Jupiter. "May I speculate a little? Time and again you received reports from people who believed that there was a great secret and treasure. They were put on the trail with a mystery story. Presumably the victims had to pay a large sum of money to the agent who was supposed to bring them here to a chamber that was made to look old and authentic.

"The victims were taken here and they were anaesthetized. The money was taken from them and then they were put back on the street. None of the victims knew where this chamber was because they were brought here in a closed van. So you had no concrete evidence for your police work."

The Commissioner looked at Jupiter. "I don't understand you fully, but I'm sure you're right. Americans always want to be right." He smiled. "Show us the men."

"With pleasure. Please follow me," said Jupiter.

Jupiter led the Commissioner into the Sphinx chamber, where Dalbello alias Dick Vincent and Abaza were. He arrested them after they regained consciousness.

"And we will find their helpers," the Commissioner said proudly.

Relieved at the happy ending of the story, but also a little disappointed that the whole set-up was a scam, The Three Investigators went back to their hotel late at night after interrogations at the police headquarters.

Ali was behind the wheel. "It's a pity that you will be flying back soon. I hope you will come back."

"Surely!" said Pete, Bob and Jupiter as if from one mouth.

"... Even if we cannot write our book about the secret of the Sphinx now," Pete added somewhat grumpily. "So we need a new sponsor."

"The Commissioner has promised a reward after all," reminded Bob. "That should be enough for another visit to Egypt."

Layla put her Talky on her legs in front of her. "What about George? Dick and Abaza admitted to setting him up back then, but they want nothing to do with his disappearance in Rocky Beach!"

"That may be so," Jupiter said and smiled mischievously. "Most importantly for George is that he is cleared of all charges of embezzling funds from the bank. I could imagine that he would be happy with this outcome. Perhaps he's already back in his shack!"

The taxi had reached the hotel. Since The Three Investigators had booked the return flight for the day after tomorrow, they all agreed to let Layla and Ali show them around Cairo the next day in peace and quiet and without an exciting treasure hunt. They were very much looking forward to it.

18. Last Questions

Jupiter was right. When The Three Investigators landed in Los Angeles together with Layla three days later, Uncle Titus, who picked them up from the airport, surprised them with the news that Rubbish-George had returned to his shack. The Three Investigators could hardly wait to meet the tramp.

When Uncle Titus drove into The Jones Salvage Yard, The Three Investigators quickly jumped out, carelessly threw their luggage into the office and went to get their bicycles. At the salvage yard, they found a refurbished 21-speed bike for Layla, and off they went.

Cairo had been exciting, but The Three Investigators enjoyed cycling again through the home streets of Rocky Beach and breathing the Pacific air.

After a while, they turned into the driveway leading to the yard where Rubbish-George had his shack. They hadn't even noticed that Layla had gone missing. Pete turned around and rode back when he saw her pushing the bike a distance back.

Layla grabbed her Talky. "You've given me a wreck! The chain came off!"

"No problem!" Pete jumped off and asked her to hold on to the bike. He knelt in front of the back wheel. "Look, all you have to do is push this guide joint forward. It actually provides the tension for the chain... but this way it hangs loosely and you can easily put the chain on the sprocket... a few black fingers... turn it a little so that it winds up completely... you see?"

The chain whirled again like new.

"I'll remember you every time the chain comes off," Layla typed into her Talky with a smile.

"Only then?" Pete asked.

"Oh, you are ridiculous!" Layla snapped.

Rubbish-George had come out of his shack and watched the scene amusedly. When Pete and Layla had joined him, he remarked: "I thought you two would get along!"

Pete grinned.

Rubbish had made a pot of Egyptian tea and invited his visitors to join him in front of the shack in the sun. They accepted with thanks. Each one grabbed one of the not-so-clean-looking tea glasses without hesitation and sat on a few empty wooden boxes. Then they reported what they had found out in Cairo.

"I've been beautifully tricked," Rubbish summed up and sipped his tea. "I had no idea that Dick and Abaza were behind all this..."

Bob put down his glass to refill it. "The two have converted an abandoned military bunker into that chamber. For years, they have been putting rich people on a treasure hunt through the mystery story. The police have found out that at least five people had been conned in this way. Probably not even all of the victims have come forward because they were too embarrassed.

"Dick and Abaza have chosen their victims at their leisure. They cleverly spun a fine web with the story in which the treasure hunters increasingly caught on. And if the police did come, they are not likely to find any credible evidence. The crooks changed the story a few times to evade being tracked. From station to station, the victims lost their hopes, if they had

any at all. Along the way, the two gangsters had informers to check on the progress of their victims.”

Pete continued: “The victims had to pay a large sum of money for the agent to take them to the fake chamber, where they were frightened with an old skeleton that came from a cemetery. The two must have really enjoyed putting their stories on stage! The victims were given the knock-out spray and their money was taken away. Later they were dropped off at some obscure location.”

“However, it was different in our case,” Jupe took over. “We were not in their target group. We don’t have the kind of money that they want. Dick also knew Layla came here to look for you and when she would return to Cairo.

“But in that morning before Layla’s return, we turned up at the Tomb of the Priest and the museum, and his informers alerted him. Inadvertently, I told Alaza which hotel we were staying in and I also mentioned your name. It was a mistake because Dick immediately knew that we were somehow connected with Layla.

“Dick followed us and tried to discourage our progress by getting the letter, attempting abduction and threatening us. When his sidekicks informed him that we were going to the airport before Layla’s arrival, he went there with one of his goons to abduct Layla and later, Pete. He wanted to get us and Layla out of the way in case we exposed his scam.”

“At the bazaar, I was surprised that the agent did not ask us to pay as stated in the letter,” Pete continued. “As Jupe explained, we were not targeted for the money. They knew would turn up at the bazaar and Alaza was there in his black garb disguise to take us to the chamber. They had wanted to knock us out and get rid of us like their other victims so that we would not pursue the case anymore.”

Rubbish-George scratched his beard thoughtfully. “I never even got to see the fake chamber. The guy already took my money when I was in the van. Most of all, I had no idea that it could be so dangerous. I’m sorry.”

“Anyway, it turned out well,” Bob concluded. “Just before we left Cairo, the police informed us that they have rounded up the whole gang.”

“So George,” Pete said. “Dick, of all people, was able to frame you for the crime at the bank, and at the same time, got rid of a competitor for the job and maybe for Layla’s mother.”

“After that you disappeared from Egypt?” Bob asked.

“Yes, I was wanted for embezzling money and had nothing in my hand. I was very embarrassed by all this. Who would have believed me? I was ashamed... and I swore to myself that I would never be cheated again—even though I didn’t understand the true extent of the story at the time... but you now have cleared that up.”

“We solved the case because we wanted to know who destroyed your shack and what had happened to you,” Jupiter said with an undertone in his voice.

Rubbish-George got a red head. “I’m afraid I don’t have to beat around the bush, huh? Yeah, that’s right. I’m responsible for this mess myself. I knew all this would give you a mystery you couldn’t say no to. I went into hiding in Santa Monica for a while and a buddy of mine turned my valuable place and possessions upside down!”

Pete swallowed. So he had fallen into the trap!

“And why did you arrange this whole thing?” Pete wanted to know. “Why didn’t you go and find the chamber yourself?”

George smiled. “Ah yes... my life in Egypt. It’s all over. I am finished in Egypt... for a long time. Then suddenly someone from the Rocky Beach city council told me a certain Layla asked for me.”

His eyes went to the girl. "I knew what you were after, Layla... but I was afraid to meet you, not because I didn't like you... quite the opposite!" Rubbish paused to search for words and looked again at The Three Investigators. "I did not want to be reminded. To meet Layla and hear her questions would have opened old wounds.

"But Layla wouldn't give up, I knew her that well. She had her stubbornness... and if I couldn't stop her from taking care of my past, she shouldn't do it alone. I told the man from the city council a time when Layla could meet me here... and I called Pete to come at the same time."

"So you wanted us to meet?" Pete asked.

Rubbish grinned. "You've never despised a beautiful girl before."

"That's not why I asked," Pete blushed.

"I feared that without the support of California's best investigators, Layla would not be able to solve the mystery—especially since I couldn't explain to myself what had happened back then. I like Layla too much to have allowed her to throw herself into such an adventure alone."

Pete could understand that.

"It worked," Rubbish concluded and winked at Pete. "Both."

"And who hit me in the dark passageway behind your shack," Pete asked, without going into the last remark. "That really wasn't you, was it?"

Rubbish's face changed. Embarrassed, he scratched his head, then he grinned. "Smashin' Joe—a buddy of mine from Santa Monica. He made this mess for me in my humble shack. He cost me a few cans of beer... The guy was a little too thorough... but unfortunately too slow. I should have known. He always is... Suddenly when you came, he slipped out the secret door and listened in on you."

"Until I showed up where he was," Pete said.

Rubbish nodded. "Then Joe panicked! Wanted to do his job and not be discovered. He punched you in the head and took off. Might have been a little rough."

"Rough... that's a very nice way of putting it," grumbled Pete. "Is this how he always solves his problems?"

"Only if he doesn't know what else to do."

"Well, I hope that won't happen so often," Pete said surly.

Rubbish smiled. "I'll give him the message."

"Uh... by the way..." Pete reached into his pocket, pulled out a ten-dollar banknote and handed it to the tramp. "Here's the ten dollars we owe you..."

"Heh!" Rubbish grinned. "Keep it! I owe you one for all the trouble I got you into... but it's only for this time!" He smiled.

"George!" Layla tapped into her Talky. "Come back to Egypt! Now that everything's settled. My mother kicked Dick out of the house! Come back to us!"

Rubbish shook his head that the long, sticky hair flew through the air. "It's in the past! There were misunderstandings and mistakes. It will never be the same again. I live here now!"

"Live? You hang around pointlessly," Pete remarked.

Rubbish-George grinned. "Well, yes, I did mess up a little back then. And it's good that the ancient Egyptian story has been clarified! Things will turn out fine, and right now, Rocky Beach is my home."

Layla didn't move from the spot. "Maybe you're right, George," she said. "But while I'm here, I want to talk to you—at least for a moment. I want to thank you for being a friend to me and my mother. It means a lot to me!"

Rubbish-George scratched his head and his eyes sparkled.

“All right!” he said. “Come on in, Layla! If you don’t mind my little mess...”